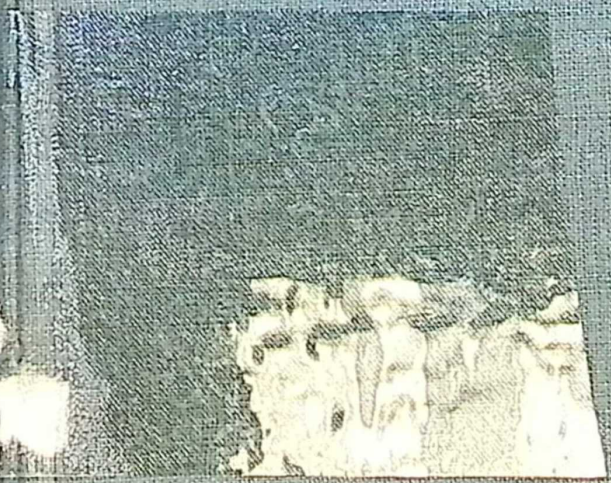
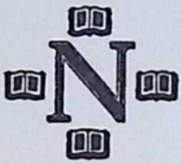
ISRAEL'S PROPHETS

GEORGE L. PETRIE





ISRAEL'S PROPHETS

BY

GEORGE L. PETRIE, D. D.

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INTRODUCTION

The Prophets of Israel were the preachers, teachers, statesmen, and reformers of their day. Prediction was only a part, sometimes a small part, of their mission to the world. They were great and good men whose lives were potent factors in the problems of their times. Of all men none are worthier to be known; none more difficult to know. They delighted to dwell in the shadow of the messages with which they brightened the world.

The purpose of these pages is to seek an introduction to these men whose writings form an important part of the Book of books. The better we know the men, the better we shall understand their messages. Men speak by their lives as well as by their words. Their most effective messages come by their words through their lives.

The endeavor here is made to gather what may be known about these grand and rugged characters; to let our knowledge of the messengers help us to comprehend their messages; to get in touch with the men, that into their words may be breathed something of the lives they lived.

GEORGE L. PETRIE.

CHARLOTTESVILLE, VA.,
November 6, 1911.

CONTENTS

		PAGE
I.	JONAH,	9
II.	JOEL,	24
III.	AMOS,	37
IV.	HOSEA,	53
V.	NAHUM,	68
VI.	MICAH,	83
VII.	ISAIAH,	98
VIII.	ZEPHANIAH,	114
IX.	HABAKKUK,	128
X.	JEREMIAH,	144
XI.	EZEKIEL,	160
XII.	DANIEL,	175
XIII.	OBADIAH,	189
XIV.	HAGGAI,	202
XV.	ZECHARIAH,	214
XVI.	MALACHI,	228

ISRAEL'S PROPHETS

I

JONAH

"Jonah, the son of Amittai."—JONAH 1: 1.

THE prophetical books of the Bible are not arranged in chronological order. The men who wrote the books or uttered the prophecies did not follow each other in the order in which their writings are collected in the sacred Volume. Of the sixteen prophets from Isaiah to Malachi, Jonah's name appears as the ninth; whereas in regard to time he is supposed to have been the first. In selecting the prophets for the theme of Bible study it has seemed best to adopt a strictly chronological order so far as that order may be ascertained; to take these men in the order in which they lived and prophesied. The prophet was one of the greatest factors in the problems of his day. More than others he made his day what it came to be. The order of unfolding events seems therefore to be the proper order in which to study those great characters that molded the times illumined by their lives.

At the threshold of this gallery of ancient worthies first appears Jonah, Amittai's noted son. His name heads the list; hence, invites consideration first. Consider the prophet in three aspects. Three places vividly present the three phases of his life. Jonah at Gath-hepher; Jonah at Sea; Jonah at Nineveh.

I.—JONAH AT GATH-HEPHER

Gath-hepher is his home. It is well to know the man, who he is, and what he is, ere by Heaven's command he is commissioned to a distant, foreign land. "Jonah" signifies "a dove." The father scarcely can lay clear claim to inspiration in the naming of his son, for whatever Jonah resembles, he seems most unlike the meek and gentle dove.

1. Three Traditions.—There are three very interesting traditions about the early life of Jonah—traditions very plausible, and probable in a high degree.

It was a time of severest drought. The earth was parched; the heavens were brazen. A poor widow, whose only companion was a son of tender age, comes forth from the gate of Zarephath to gather fuel to make her last fire and prepare her last meal, that she and her little son may die. She hears the weird voice of one faint and weary with thirst and travel—"Fetch me, I pray, a little water that I may drink." "Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand." The mother knew not what great blessings were held in the hand of the worn and weary traveler at the city gate. She fed the stranger from her little

store, but knew not that it was Elijah that received the gift. She gave, and her store was multiplied. From it the mother and her son drew unfailing supplies. That son was Jonah, now preserved from death by Elijah, and afterwards by the same man of God raised out of death and restored to his mother's loving embrace.

Again, when Elijah fled from Jezebel, and sought the gloomy solitude of Horeb in the distant south, one friend out of the vast multitude remained faithful to him, followed him in his flight and adhered to him in this crisis of his life, nor parted from him till Beersheba was reached and Elijah bade him stay. That friend was the Zidonian boy of Zarephath, Jonah, the future prophet of the Lord.

Once more, the scene is a camp of Israel's warriors. The wounded king has been carried home to the royal palace of Jezreel. Jehu is in command. A youth arrives in camp. His garments are covered with the dust of the highway. His eyes flash with the conscious responsibility of his great mission. He is in haste to see the general in command. Observe! he has a vessel of sacred oil in his hand. By a rapid glance he singles out Jehu, to whom he has been sent. The general and the youth enter the house, and seek the inner chamber. Hidden from the view of all the world the youth empties the vessel of sacred oil upon the head of Jehu, proclaims him king, and vanishes as strangely as he came. The stranger was the widow of Zarephath's son, Elijah's faithful friend, Elisha's trusted messenger, Jonah the future prophet of the Lord.

2. *His Home.*—It is in the Kingdom of Israel. The noble monarchy upon whose throne the immortal trio had sat—Saul, David, Solomon—had now been rent in twain. Upon its ruin had been reared the kingdom of Judah and the kingdom of Israel—the former comprising the two tribes Judah and Benjamin; the latter comprising what was familiarly known as the ten tribes. A very great difference marked these two sister kingdoms. The kingdom of Israel was noted for its wicked kings. With scarcely an exception they were miserable tyrants and abandoned idolators. It was equally noted for its grand and noble prophets. In this realm of wicked kings and grand prophets Jonah lived. The village of Gath-hepher, in lower Galilee amid the wooded hills and glassy plots and vine-clad slopes of Zebulun, is the honored home of Jonah, the illustrious servant of God.

3. *The Age in Which He Lived.*—It was during the reign of Jeroboam II, the greatest of Israel's kings; a time of unparalleled prosperity. The preceding reign of Jehu was disastrous. In Scripture's emphatic language, "In those days [Jehu's] the Lord began to cut Israel short. Hazael smote them in all the coast of Israel; from Jordan eastward, all the land of Gilead, the Gadites, the Reubenites, the Manassites, from Aroer, which is by the river Arnon, even Gilead and Bashan." Defeat followed defeat. Crushing misfortunes with alarming rapidity closed in upon disconsolate Israel. Such was the condition of affairs when Jeroboam II ascends the throne; and Jonah first distinctly enters the scene. This great

king, one of earth's real heroes, though a wicked man, was an eminently successful warrior. He rode forth triumphantly against his foes; retook Israel's lost cities; recovered its coasts; widened its borders; renewed its former splendor; caused the song of gladness to be heard once more throughout the land. Jeroboam's reign was a sort of jubilee for deliverance from threatened evils. Of all the periods of Israel's history, if it were given one to choose that in which he would prefer to live; if the choice were determined by a desire to dwell amid grandest outward display and most imposing material prosperity, offset by recent but now departed dangers,—he might well and unhesitatingly choose the time in which Jonah lived. No better picture of those prosperous days can be given than by comparing them to the blue skies, fresh verdure, and pure air which succeed the storm.

Jonah was largely instrumental in accomplishing this prosperity for his native land. It is expressly said that Jeroboam wrought his splendid achievements "according to the word of the Lord by his servant Jonah." The joyous occasion of triumph had not only crowned the great warrior king with laurels, but had wreathed the brow of Jonah, the servant of the living God. He who had drawn the sword, returned it to its scabbard stained with the blood of valiant and defeated foes. But the man who had been the mouth-piece of Jehovah, whose prophecies had successfully guided the armies of the king, rejoiced to hear the note of peace and to see his country raised from the ashes of its ruins and started once more on the high road to success. Jonah

was of great repute among the people; and of great influence at court. He was a sort of prime minister to his king. The proud monarch heeded him. The populace expressed its appreciation in applause. God had honored his servant; had made him the instrument of accomplishing great good for his native land. The lowering clouds were broken, the muttering thunders were hushed, the clear light of the sun shone again with radiant beauty on the land. There was peace—not of defeat when there are no weapons to use, no arms to raise, no hearts to stir; but of glorious victory, every foe driven back, every enemy conquered, and harmony at home.

There are times when men prefer to leave their homes! Why is it men sometimes are seen quitting the homes of their childhood, where they were born and reared, and where upon every meadow path and hillside are engraved ineffaceably childhood scenes, where loved ones lived and died and lie buried to await the resurrection morn? Ask the Huguenot! Was not France dear to him? Ask the Pilgrim of Plymouth Rock! Was it not of dear old England he sang and dreamed? Yes; but when all that is dearest to heart has been ruthlessly torn away home becomes a mockery, and distance alone can give ease to the troubled heart. Thus it might have been with Jonah in Jehu's reign. He might then have thanked God for a foreign commission to the great city of Nineveh. But in Jeroboam's time it was worth while for a man to stay at home to enjoy the peace, quiet, pleasure, and prosperity of his native land. Besides, who can tell

what promotion may await the prophet at the hand of a grateful people and an approving king?

II.—JONAH AT SEA

The quiet of Gath-hepher, Jonah's Galilean home, one day was interrupted by a voice that came from heaven. The Lord said, "Arise; go to Nineveh." Jonah arose and fled to Tarshish. He went in precisely the opposite direction to that to which God sent him. First his course is to Joppa, the one seaport on Israel's coast, about seventy-five miles distant from his home amid the hills of Zebulun. Alone he treads the rugged way, his heaviest burden doubtless his reproving conscience; fleeing from the presence of the Lord. With haste he presses onward to the shore. He tarries not in all the way. Passing many familiar scenes, he looks not upon them. He turns not his eye to right or left, but presses on toward Joppa. What zeal is oft evinced in fleeing from the presence of the Lord! Jonah enters the town. Doubtless he had been there before, but now he has no time and no inclination to greet his friends or bestow a prophet's blessing on them. Down to the rugged sea-shore he hastes and finds a ship just ready to sail for Tarshish. The shores of Spain, upon the utmost verge of the then known world, are the very shores for him. Anywhere but Nineveh! The farther the better. He flees from the presence of the Lord.

The prophet secures his berth, pays his fare,

enters the ship. Did he register his name? He has no desire to be recognized as a fleeing prophet—in flight from the presence of the Lord, and disobedient to the divine command. The fare is paid, and it is rightly paid. No one now can tell how much it was in dollars and cents, or in shekels and gerahs. But all know full well it was a bad bargain Jonah made; bad for Jonah, bad for the shipowners, bad for the captain and his crew, bad for the cargo and the consignees. Poor Jonah had not much baggage and no freight, yet when once he enters the ship bound for Tarshish a burden is stored away in its hold which nearly sends ship and cargo to the quicksands and quagmires of the sea. There are burdens men cannot see, which they must bear; burdens which they cannot always rightly estimate, from which yet they cannot make escape; burdens intensified by time; the burdens that oppress all those who seek to flee from the presence of the Lord.

The tide rises. The breeze quickens. The anchor is lifted and the chain rattles as it is hauled in. The sails one by one are spread. One by one they flap to the stiffening wind. The ship, obedient to her cordage and her sails, swings around, and amid the prayers and blessings of spectators standing on the shore, like a thing of life, gracefully as the swan, cleaves the rippling waters and bounds outward to the open sea. The merchant stands upon the shore and watches the vessel on whose successful voyage depends his wealth. Full of hope, as the sail is lost to view, he prays Heaven's blessings on the frail bark that bears his treasure to the distant port. Jonah

stands upon the deck. His eye lingers on the receding shore. There is trouble in his heart. See the beautiful robe of blue which distance casts over the hills of Palestine! See Carmel's forest-covered dome where Elijah wrought his wonders. See snow-capped Hermon with its triple peaks rising high near Gath-hepher, where the prophet Jonah lived. Who does not love his native land! Jonah turns away from the fascinating, fading scene. He seeks to conquer swelling grief, and to calm his troubled soul, and to smooth his ruffled brow.

Why be disturbed? How fair the skies and calm the sea. Now the shores had faded quite away. Oppressed, he turns to his berth. He cannot pray. On the deep, exposed to numerous perils, he finds no access to the heavenly throne. What shall he do? Nature is tired. Weary with his long journey over the mountains, hills, and valleys he falls asleep.

Elijah once stood on Carmel, looked far out to sea, and beheld a little cloud, which rapidly spread and soon covered the sky and refreshed the earth with rain. Now out on this same sea almost in sight of Carmel a little cloud is seen. It rises rapidly. It spreads over the heavens. The wind blows a gale. The waters are tumultuous. The waves break rudely on the struggling ship. The clouds above and the waters beneath are mingled together in one portentous mass. The day becomes night by the stormy darkness. The ship creaks at every joint. The masts quiver as if ready to leap from their places. The sails are torn to shreds. The captain and his crew, though nurtured on the

winds and tossed by many storms, are now afraid. Every man falls upon his knees to pray to his God. The freight, on which the merchant rested his hope and prayed Heaven's blessings, is cast overboard. And yet the vessel is no lighter. It sinks as deep as ever in the troubled waters. It is as unmanageable as ever in the fury of the tempest. It is strange!

Summon the men together! Where is that passenger that got aboard at Joppa? Search for him. Away down in the ship, through all the fury of the storm, sleeps Jonah, the weary, fleeing prophet of the Lord. Bring him up! What meanest thou, O sleeper? Arise, call on thy God. No? He cannot pray. The man of God, yet cannot pray. The heathen crew are all praying, and worshiping some deity. But Jonah is silent. It seems a marvel that they did not at once cast him overboard. But they are generous enough to cast lots to see who shall be the victim to appease the anger of the imaginary god. "And the lot fell upon Jonah." He is allowed to pronounce his own sentence. "What shall we do unto thee?" And he said, "Take me up and cast me forth into the sea." But still they would not. They rowed hard to bring the ship to land, but they could not. When all efforts to prevent have failed, they bring him to the ship-side and pronounce a solemn funeral service for the once honored servant of the Lord. Amid the roaring winds and tumultous waters the crew gather around the man and cast him forth into the sea, and as he sank beneath the billows the sea ceased from her raging.

III.—JONAH AT NINEVEH

Mysteriously preserved from death and borne through the waters, Jonah once more stands upon the shore of his native land. And the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time, saying, "Go unto Nineveh." So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh He found it very expensive and very perilous and very disastrous to disobey the Lord's command.

1. The City.—It was a great journey the repentant prophet made, full of danger and abounding in fatigue. A man in this day can more easily and more comfortably go around the world than Jonah then could go from Gath-hepher to Nineveh. But notice, that he did not make the way shorter nor the time quicker nor the road smoother, by going by way of Joppa and Tarshish. Nineveh was an exceeding great city. It was built through pride. Ninus resolved to build the most splendid city that could adorn the earth. God calls it "that great city." It measured 18 miles long; 12 miles wide; 60 miles around. It is this 60 miles' circuit to which Jonah refers when he says, "Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey." Its walls were 100 feet high, and broad enough for three chariots to drive abreast. Its walls were fortified and adorned with 1500 towers 200 feet high. An immense population was enclosed within these walls. There were 120,000 that could not discern between their right hand and their left hand. It seemed a useless task

for one man to go to such a vast city with such a great population with any hope of producing a change in their sentiment and practices. But Jonah had learned much in God's school of providence and in his own wonderful experience. He had learned this valuable lesson well—that when God commands, to the obedient He opens the way; that to Him there are no difficulties; that human wisdom is to obey divine commands; that from the presence of the Lord there can be no escape. So he arose and went. He toiled over mountains and rivers, valleys and plains. At length he sees the city's distant walls and shining towers. He gathers together his thoughts, enters the massive gate of Nineveh the great, walks along the splendid avenues, brilliant, grand, and imposing to the eye of the plain man of Gath-hepher in Galilee. He remembers now that he is a prophet of the Lord who holds the heavens in His hands, and he cries out up and down the streets, "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown."

2. The Message.—The wonder is that violent hands were not laid on him insantly. Wonder! No! He who shut the lions' mouths for Daniel's sake, He who shook the prison till Paul and Silas were brought out, He who sent an angel to lead Peter forth from the prison through the iron gate, sent his guardian angel to encamp around the prophet in a foreign land, to shield him from all harm. Nineveh's greatness was equaled only by its wickedness. But the lonely stranger prophet far from his Galilean home, who once in fear had fled from God, now undismayed raises the voice of condemnation in

the heathen city's streets. That is bold! That is heroic! But how can the prophet expect by his one voice and his foreign accent, and his uncommanding presence, to reform these Ninevites? It is not his to reform the Ninevites, but only to deliver God's message. Not by might, nor by power, but my Spirit, saith the Lord. "Preach the preaching that I bid thee"; this is God's command. The Hand that guided the stone from David's sling touches with gracious power the heart of Nineveh's great king, and sways the people with the strange utterance of the unknown man of God.

3. The Result.—One day's work; one sermon, that very brief, and oft repeated; one servant of God: these the visible means. The result: a whole city thrilled, shaken from center to circumference; the king descending from the throne, laying off his royal robe, covered with sack-cloth, sitting in ashes; the nobles prostrate; the populace refusing food; and all calling mightily unto God for His heavenly blessing. Nineveh repents and prays. He who is ever willing to be gracious quickly catches the plaintive strains of penitential prayer, wipes out the writing against the great city. Nineveh is saved!

Blessed ministry of salvation! Happy service of grace! What a splendid mission was Jonah's! A city saved in a day! Surely the successful prophet will tune his lyre to a joyful note and let his voice give utterance to praise! No? No happy note; no cheerful strain. A frown shadows his brow; anger stirs his heart. Sullenly he retires without the city that by his ministry was saved, to see what God

would do. His head is sheltered from the burning sun by the gourd of mysterious growth that sprang up in a night. But a worm speedily nipped the vine, and it withered soon and died. When the sun arose and the silent east wind blew, Jonah, faint and distressed, makes his complaint to God.

If the prophet mourned the disaster which befell the gourd, which he had not made and did not even own, which came up in a night and perished in a night, shall not the Lord spare Nineveh the great city with its multitude of souls?

So Jonah disappears from the page of human history. He vanishes in a cloud. Not a cloud of fire such as received Elijah and by a whirlwind bore him up to heaven. Not a cloud of glory such as bore the ascending Lord from His disciples' vision on the Mount of Olives. But a cloud of mystery, disappointment and unrighteous anger.

Jonah's life is memorable for its thrilling events, its great perils, its marvelous escapes, its brilliant achievements, its sad failures, its grievous sins, its profound mysteries. Few are the men on whose pathway a brighter light has shone, and a darker shadow has fallen. Few have risen to greater heights of honor and service, and have fallen to deeper depths of disappointment and oblivion. His life is a conspicuous signal of the rock where the frail bark is often wrecked on the dangerous shore of life's stormy sea.

The world bids the prophet adieu, wishing only that the ruffled brow had been somewhat smoothed and the troubled spirit had been completely calmed

ere he ceased to speak and concluded the record of his great mission. The world's last vision of the prophet is the darkest. God gently said "Jonah, doest thou well to be angry?" He said: "I do well to be angry even unto death." He says no more. The curtain falls. The scene is concluded. The story is told. Silence like a robe enwraps the man of God.

There is a striking peculiarity of Jonah's Book of Prophecy, which it shares with only one other book in all the Bible. It concludes with a question. An interrogation point marks the end. It is God's question, which Jonah did not answer; which never has been answered. It is the great unanswered question of the ages. It is like those lives men live that give no answer to the great question God has asked. The supreme interrogation mark in mercy still stands awaiting what answer men will give. What?

II

JOEL

"The word of the Lord that came to Joel the son of Pethuel."—JOEL 1: 1.

IN the study of the prophet Joel three topics invite consideration, as they serve to answer the three questions apt to be asked about the prophet and his book: Joel the man, the message, and the meaning.

I.—JOEL THE MAN

It is well first of all to gather together the few facts which may be learned concerning the prophet himself, and thus come to know the man somewhat apart from his prophecy. A richer, more sacred name than Joel scarcely can be framed: Jo-el, Jehovah-Elohim, God's two greatest names. Its meaning: Jehovah is God. Appropriate title this surely is for God's messenger in any day, and, as will appear in this study, peculiarly appropriate in Joel's day and in the accomplishment of Joel's mission.

At first glance it seems that when thus much is said all has been said that may be learned about this man of God. The name is not an unusual one

in the sacred records. No less than fourteen Joels are mentioned in the Bible. Hence, to designate this one his father's name is given. Who is Joel? The son of Pethuel. Who is Pethuel? The father of Joel. Thus the small circle is completed with very little increment of knowledge concerning either man.

These inspired writers have a wonderful fondness and facility for hiding themselves behind the messages which they convey. It often seems an almost hopeless task to trace the prophet's self amid the glowing prophecies which in rich profusion he reveals. He delivers God's message with a note as clear and full and melodious as a bugle's blast, and reveals it radiant as the sun; but himself retreats from human view, makes slight mention of the messenger, that none may gaze upon the prophet, to forget the prophet's message and the prophet's God.

See the small basis on which a knowledge of this prophet rests. He is never mentioned in the historical records of his country. His name occurs in the Bible only twice; once at the head of the book which bears his name and once in the Book of Acts, where his prophecy is quoted. Add to these Bible statements the Jewish tradition, and it is learned that Joel was born in Bethhoron, the famous western mountain pass of Benjamin, down whose narrow way Israel hurled her enemies in the olden days, and on whose height the setting sun prolonged its light, and lengthened the day in the shadowed valley of Aijalon. Reared amid such historic scenes, it would be but natural that Joel's heart even in childhood should glow with patriotic fire. All the prophets

were patriots of noblest type. As the legendary story goes, it was the privilege of Joel to live all his days amid the scenes where he was born, and where childhood's happy days were spent. He ends his eventful life as he began it, near Bethhoron's historic mountain pass.

This is about all that can be gathered concerning Joel apart from his writings. Small as is this sum of knowledge about the man, it is not without its value as an introduction to the study of the message which he was divinely commissioned to deliver and record.

II.—THE MESSAGE

The book of Joel, though very brief, is famous, and richly merits the fame with which it has been crowned. It is a literary gem; a poem of exquisite beauty and much grandeur. As a poem it is not chained to rhyme, nor fettered with a measurement of lines and a recurrence of verses, nor subjected to the iron rule of cadence. Joel's book is the poetry of thought. Often there is more of poetry in prose than there is in verse. It is only those in whose souls is enshrined the true genius of poetry that need not fence in their poems with spondees, dactyls, and iambuses. Such is Joel; such his book. No uncultured man is this seer. He is master of the flowing pen, the rounded period, the rhetorical figure, cultivated taste and exquisite finish. His sentences are beautiful. The graces of his style are full of charm. His allusions are captivating. His words frequently are flashlights of truth. Joel is regarded

by all competent scholars to be among the most classical of Hebrew writers. One such judge claims for him that he has the strength of Micah, the tenderness of Jeremiah, the vividness of Nahum, and the sublimity of Isaiah.

Joel predicts a twofold calamity casting a gloomy shadow over the land: a disastrous drought and an equally dreadful and disastrous scourge of locusts. This double calamity was so severe that it became memorable in the annals of the kingdom. The description of it which Joel gives is a literary masterpiece. His facile pen and cultivated thought and admirable diction find here a worthy theme. It is a vivid picture he presents. There are the vineyards, but the vines are dead. There are the orchards, but the fig, the pomegranate, the palm, the apple are withered. Joy is blasted in the hearts of men. There stands the altar, but it is bare. There is nothing to place upon it as an offering to God. There are the priests ready to minister, arrayed not in their white, pure garments, but clad in black sackcloth, a sad and somber band. There are the garners and the barns, but there is not treasure of the field to store away. The herds are perplexed to find a pasture, and the flocks are desolate.

The heavens are darkened, but not by clouds that promise rain to the thirst of man and beast. The deep darkness that resembles night is caused by the dense cloud of devouring locusts, whose approach and overshadowing presence is like "morning spread upon the mountains," an exquisite and poetic touch to the scene; "as the morning spread upon the moun-

tains:" sudden, swift, sure, silent. Before them is a garden of Eden. Behind them a desolate wilderness.

At such a time there is naught to do but pray. Calamities are God's calls to prayer. Between the porch and the altar there is fasting, weeping, praying. God hears, and renews His bounties, and multiplies His blessings in the land.

Then the prophet opens a vista to human gaze. All through it to its utmost reach are revealed the calamities of men, closely linked with which are the greater blessings God is ever ready to give to those who in penitence and faith call on His name. As the Psalter concludes with a splendid burst of hallelujahs, so this prophetic vista culminates in the supreme event, still the goal of human hope, when the Lord completely reveals Himself as "the hope of his people": their safe retreat, their sure refuge, and their happy dwelling-place. The prophet sees locusts and drought near at hand. He gazes further and sees descending armies and wasting wars. He looks again and beholds the Judgment in the Valley of Decision, an assembled world and the righteous Judge. But his message is not complete till the gloomy grandeur gives way, and through rift of the cloud a ray of light breaks foretokening the dawning day of hope. The sad music of the bard is hushed. The prophet-poet-singer sounds a new note, a note of joy, and warbles redemption's happy song. Beautiful message! Beautifully by the prophet told! Read it. Look on the picture it presents. Surely

it will please and charm and help. If not, it will not be Joel's fault.

III.—THE MEANING

No one can feel quite satisfied with such a hasty glance at such an admirable book as Joel's glowing Prophecy. There remains a desire to know more of what Joel meant by his charming words and pleasing numbers. The best commentary on any prophecy is a familiarity with the scenes that gave it birth and suggested its allusions. To know a man's thoughts it is desirable to know more than his words. There is need to know to whom he spoke, when he spoke, where he spoke, why he spoke, and, if possible, the tones of voice in which he spoke. Here are Joel's words a precious legacy. But what were the scenes amid which Joel lived and prophesied? To reverse the course of time and for awhile live with Joel will give new meaning to his words and a keener perception of the mission to which he was divinely called.

Where Did Joel Live?—It is comparatively easy to say where he prophesied. The most casual reader of the book of Joel can observe the frequent recurrences of the words Zion, Jerusalem, Judah, priest, and altar. All these, like sign-posts along the road, direct the inquirer's thought to the southern kingdom of Judah. The prophet's thoughts cluster around Jerusalem. He dwells in the sheen of the Temple. His heart is enwrapped in the sacred glories of Jehovah's house. He has been supposed by some

to have been a priest that served at Jehovah's altar. As Jonah was sent to the northern kingdom of Israel, Joel was God's messenger to the southern kingdom of Judah.

When Did Joel Live?—Intensely interesting is the question when he lived and prophesied—a question not so easily answered. From the subject which Joel treats, from his mode of treatment, and from his allusions it has been ascertained, by general though not universal consent, when he lived and prophesied. Joel's period is a very marked era in Judah's history. It is a period perfectly unique, unlike any other in the sweep of its ages; a period that not only possesses thrilling interest, but demands more than a casual notice. Retrace the centuries. Stand on the hill of Zion amid its royal splendors in Joel's day. Mark the leading features of the age. Every one of these leading features is exceptional. Joel's day is marked by great events that stand out singly in Judah's history. It is often said that history repeats itself. So it often does. But the great events that cluster around Joel's day are unique.

First. A Drama Invites Notice.—It is the only drama of absorbing interest that marks the history of Judah's kingdom. The history of Israel's kingdom is full of tragedies. The succession of its kings is marked by blood. Its kings were a set of usurpers with whom might alone was right. Its annals record almost as many dynasties as kings. The history of Israel's kingdom is marked by revolutions. Not so in the kingdom of Judah. There the royal succession was regular. Each king was succeeded by his

legal heir. It was David's house to which the royalty belonged, and David's son sat on the throne. Through the centuries of Judah's history this prophecy never failed. Read the list of Judah's kings and see how they were linked as father and son. The succession was so much a matter of course that there seems ordinarily to have been no coronation ceremony; either none, or none recorded. Each princely heir was recognized as born within the pale of royalty. This quiet, smooth, undisturbed succession was interrupted once, and that in Joel's day. From the exciting scenes of this almost revolution, which seemed for a time to defy heaven's prophecy and David's royal rights, and caused Judah's destiny to tremble in the balance, Joel catches the fire which burns and glows in his inimitable prophecy. How came this drama acted?

Second. A Royal Marriage.—This brings out another unique feature of the day. Israel and Judah warred against each other till their energies and resources were exhausted. Mutually worsted by their conflicts, they rushed into each other's arms and formed a firm alliance of friendship, and cemented the alliance by a royal marriage. Jehoram, prince of Judah and heir to David's throne, was united in marriage to Athaliah, princess of Israel, daughter of noted Ahab and Jezebel. This is the only union by marriage between the royal families of Judah and Israel.

Amid the grand displays, imposing rites, and costly feasts which according to Oriental customs marked this doubly royal marriage, the child Joel

may be regarded as an interested observer, little dreaming what strange events were hastening on, and even now casting their shadows before them. Of the beautiful young queen Athaliah who attracts and rivets the gaze of Judah's court it is enough to say that she is the daughter of Jezebel. Watch her and wait!

Third. Two Vacant Thrones.—Two vacant thrones mark this memorable era. This singular coincidence occurs in Joel's day, and forms a part of the gradually unfolding plot. Athaliah's husband had died. Her son Azariah had become king of Judah. She was queen-mother. Her royal son is on a visit to his uncle, king of Israel, at the ivory palace of Jezreel. There both kings fall victims to Jehu's zeal. The two kingdoms are bereft of their monarchs at one blow. Quick as thought Athaliah seizes the golden moment of her opportunity. She grasps the reins of government at Jerusalem, occupies the throne, and proclaims herself queen. Thus once, and only once, sits a queen on David's throne. That she may have no rival to these royal honors she destroys all the seed royal. She becomes the murderer of her own grandchildren. The whole race of David seems by this fiendish act to be swept away. What now has become of the divine prophecy which assures David of an heir to sit on his throne? The king is dead, and there is not a king's son left to tell the story of the murderous deed. It seems impossible for God's gracious word to be fulfilled. Many a faith weakened and many a hope died out at the failure of the precious promise. The word upon

which the kingdom had long rested its hope seems utterly broken by the wicked daughter of the wicked Jezebel.

There remains at least one righteous man in the kingdom. He is Jehoida, the priest who had married Athaliah's daughter. This is the only instance recorded of the marriage of a priest to a member of the royal family. To every disconsolate troubled heart in these trying scenes Jehoida only says: The king's son shall reign. Is it faith, blind faith? Or is it vision that gives to Jehoida such heroic confidence?

There is a secret treasured in Jehoida's heart, a brilliant secret. There is a secret enclosed in yonder Temple walls; a secret that presently shall thrill a nation. The secret is known to very few. It is soon to be revealed.

Six years and more have glided by since Athaliah ascended the throne through the blood of her grandchildren. The people could not be trusted with a secret. Therefore through these six years Jehoida and his faithful wife abide the coming of the eventful day. The sabbath dawns. Jehoida is seen mysteriously conversing with the five officers of the royal guard. As each turns from the priest his face is kindled with surprise and joy. The sabbath guard is marched into the Temple, and is mounted. The new guard enters; but the old guard comes not out. A double force is therefore on duty in the sacred court. The guard is armed with spears and shields, the very spears and shields that as relics of David's day have long been hanging about the Temple walls.

The double guard, thus armed with David's spears and shields, will soon win back the throne and kingdom to David's house. But how?

In the center of the scene on an elevated platform stands a boy but little more than six years old. Six years ago he was rescued from the royal palace, rescued from the fell designs of Athaliah. Snatched from the destroyer by Jehoida's wife, and unknown to the world, he was secreted in the chambers of the Temple. Reared in these sacred precincts with the priest's own son, he has known no other home but the house of God. The King's son, long hidden, now stands a prince before an astonished and rejoicing people. The boy prince is the sole representative of David's house. He is anointed with the sacred oil. The diadem is placed upon his head. At that instant the shout of a happy people wakes the quiet hills and dales about Jerusalem. Joash is proclaimed by royal right, and wondrous providence, and thrilling event Judah's king. God's word is verified. His promise is fulfilled. For this heroic act Jehoida is called high priest, a title till his day unknown; a title given to neither Aaron, nor Eli, nor Zadok.

The reign of Joash was thus ushered in by a brilliant romance, romance in real life. It concluded amid the dark shadows of an awful tragedy. Jehoida the high priest died. Joash apostatized from the worship of Jehovah. Zechariah, Jehoida's son, remonstrated with the king with whom he had played about the Temple court in childhood days. For his remonstrance he paid the penalty of death. The

last words of the dying Zechariah as he weltered in his own blood at the altar's side were these: "Jehovah look upon it and require it." Sacred spot! Stained with the martyr's blood!

The sacredness of the person and the place, the guilt of the idolatrous nation, the vile ingratitude of the king—all combine to give this tragedy its significance in the New Testament, where it ends the catalogue of unrighteous deeds: "from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah who was slain between the porch and altar." The degree of the crime was not merely in that it was murder, and the murder of Jehovah's priest, but in that Joash "remembered not the kindness which Jehoida his father had done to him, but slew his son."

The solemn, portentous words of the dying priest seem to linger long: Jehovah look upon it and require it. Shall the martyr priest call in vain on God? Shall not some spirit, infused with new life, catch inspiration at the desecrated altar? Shall not some gifted seer reveal Heaven's judgment on the land for such an atrocious deed? Surely this is the time for a prophet to speak for God and truth and right.

Sometimes a prophet's presence may be felt ere he is seen or heard. The astronomer directs his glass to the starry heavens. He searches for some hidden orb. He believes it must be there. He waits and watches with upturned eye. Ere the well-defined world enters the field of his vision he feels its coming presence. The light grows brighter. Something

tells him to wait a little longer and he shall see the object of his search. Then radiant and glorious the heavenly sphere blazes on his eager eye.

The mariner approaches the long-sought shore. The night is dark and stormy. He gazes for the beacon light that shall mark out his course for safety. He believes the light is there. He cannot get on without it. Sure enough, it comes peering through the darkness, a gleam of light and hope.

So the presence of a prophet may be felt ere he is seen or heard. He is needed. He must be near. Those grand men of God aglow with patriotic fire and heavenly fervor always appear just when the world can no longer do without them.

Stand at Zechariah's altar. Hear his cry to God. Pass in review the drama which culminates in the tragedy of the priest's death. Will God not speak? Will He not break His long silence at an hour like this? Wait at the bloodstained altar and listen. The strain is tense. The silence yields to the plaintive voice of a prophet. A heavenly fervor fills his soul. He sings of judgment; then judgment mingled with mercy; then judgment transformed into mercy surpassing and divine. It is Joel, in whose soul is kindled the heavenly fire, who catches inspiration at the altar where Zechariah died. It is Joel who, standing amid the storm of judgment, sounds the clear, calm note of Gospel grace, the cleansing by a richer blood than that by martyrs ever shed.

III

AMOS

"Amos who was among the herdmen of Tekoa."—Amos 1: 1.

A few preliminary thoughts about the book of Amos first invite consideration. The artist often paints a dark background, that on it he may with greater effect display the brighter figures of his scene. Thus also in galleries of art pictures are so grouped that by their contrast—contrast in their design, contrast in their conception, contrast in the school of art—each may serve the more vividly to portray in distinct relief its own excellence and the excellence of all. It is not beneath the great Artist thus to arrange His gallery of prophetic pictures on which the world is called to look. There is great variety in the specimens of heavenly art. There are striking contrasts in the prophets and in their books. Their relative positions, whether of time or place in the sacred volume, bring these contrasts strikingly to view.

There is among them all no more striking contrast than that between Joel and Amos, between the men and between the books they have written. By their marked difference they help to attract attention and emphasize each his own and the other's

distinctive features. Joel has been studied and is therefore somewhat known. Amos next invites attention. Each reader himself may discern the clear contrast between these two prophets and their prophecies.

The style of Amos is very bold and incisive. No timid heart can beat in unison with his fearless strains. Here is a hero. None but a heroic soul can feel such sentiments or speak such words as his. His style is plain; sometimes abrupt; always vigorous. His sentences are short, much shorter than Joel's, perhaps more laconic than the sentences of any other of these Hebrew bards. He is a man under whose fervid preaching nobody can ever fall asleep. He is too terse and vigorous and vital for that. Sometimes smoothness of style and melody of cadences invite repose and lull to rest. Not so with Amos. The abruptness of his speech, the rapidity of his movement, the energy of his thoughts, demand, receive, and hold attention.

The book of Amos has not the charm of poetry, but it has the fascinating power of oratory; an oratory, not of the schools, but of nature; not ornate, but rugged; not of painstaking culture, but of impetuous and impassioned outburst. His type is more that of the renowned Grecian than of the eminent Roman orator. A marked feature of the book of Amos is that it abounds in questions. Its pages are fairly peppered with interrogation points. There are thirty questions in this booklet of the prophet's words. Any mind of classic culture will at once recall the impassioned orations of Demosthenes, in

which questions crowd each other in impetuous appeals.

Interrogation points are an important feature of a style. They are full of meaning. Often they are a most effective rhetorical figure. They defy a refutation. They demand a response. What does their profusion mean on the pages of the book of Amos? It means that the object of the prophet was not merely to reveal Heaven's purpose, but to awake a slumbering people and to stir them to reform. He awakes them with a startling question. He keeps them aroused by the repetition of his question, that they may be moved to give an answer such as God demands.

Another feature of this book of Amos is that its figures, which are not a few, which are the natural orator's favorite method of conveying and enforcing truth, are all gathered from one source. The reason of this most readily appears. All his flowers come from one garden; that garden nature's own broad fields. The figures that adorn this book are rugged figures that are drawn from the hills and dales whose only shelter is the spanning arch of heaven. Its illustrations are objects of nature and scenes familiar to plainest country life. Of all the prophetic books this is the one which the plain, unlettered laborer on the farm, in the field or forest, may most easily read. He may also most readily comprehend all its allusions with least of aid from other minds.

Such is a hasty glance at the book for whose author there must now be an earnest search: Amos

the prophet of the Lord. Amos means burden. Agreeably to this thought and meaning of the name shall be the plan of study. There are three burdens which Amos bore: his early life, his difficult office, his bold prophecy.

I.—THE BURDEN OF HIS EARLY LIFE

By the burden of his early life is meant his employment, what he was and did, before God called him to his noble prophetic office. Worldly business is often a heavy burden. It must have been so with Amos. So far as the record goes, he never murmured nor repined at the hard features of his early life. Before his divine call to prophetic office he may be found at his humble home. Where is it? Leave Jerusalem southward bound. Pass Bethlehem where Benjamin, David, and the Christ were born. Six miles still farther south brings the traveler to the village of Tekoah. It is on an elevated hill near the southern border of the kingdom of Judah. For this reason it became a signal station from which to give alarm of invading hosts either by a trumpet in the day or at night by signal fires. From that signal hill another trumpet sounds, whose echoes, while the words lasts, die not away. On that signal hill another fire is kindled, whose light shines on, till time shall be no more.

Where is this village of Tekoah? Where are the dwellings? See! Look around! What is that black covering on yonder hillside? It is the shepherds' and the herdmen's tents, covered with black goat-

skins Flocks and herds graze around; not of the nobler sort, but small in growth and inferior in quality. Only such can live amid these barren hills and impoverished valleys. These shepherds and herdmen cannot live by flocks and herds alone. Hence, may be discerned another branch of industry combined with the care of flocks and herds.

Those large trees under which the cattle and the sheep are resting yield a fruit called sycamore figs. Gathering and dressing these figs for the market supplements the scanty living of the plain shepherds and herdmen of Tekoah. How plain the manner of their living! How obscure their home! How humble their dwellings! The burden of poverty rests heavily on them. Yet among them, performing his humble duties without complaint, not ashamed of lowly work, patiently bearing the burden of their early cares and toils, there is a man whose name has been wafted down the ages, whose words have caused thrones to totter and kings to tremble with alarm. It is Amos, who records in his book of prophecy that he was among the herdmen of Tekoah when God called him to the grander service of a seer. Often indeed has genius been cradled in poverty, reared in close companionship with want, and disciplined with hard service and anxious cares. Often those whose names have become immortal have known no free and happy childhood exempt from care but have been snatched almost from the cradle and from the mother's arms, and put to dreary work—robbed of childhood's sweet right and joyous inheritance.

Such seems to have been the early life of Amos: a

life of poverty, hard tasks, and unrequiting toil. No wonder, then, in after days, when he would enrich his messages of truth with illustrations to attract and please the people and to enforce the words he spoke, he gathered all his flowers from the fields about Tekoah, or from the mountains and valleys of the land. All his riches are outdoor riches; free to the humblest and the poorest of mankind. Zion, Carmel, Gilead, Beth-Aven, Beth-Eden, all are his, just as the grandeur and the glory of the world are his. At his command they are tributary to the truth he tells. The lion, the bear, and the bird are his to help the message that he brings. The fields, the grain, the rain, the harvest, and the reapers reflect the visions that the prophet sees. The morning in the beauty of its dawn and the night with its starry skies yield to the rural seer their beauties for the enrollment of his words. Amos, before he wrote his prophecies in a book, like his greater Master, wrote them on the world, left their traces in nature, to which he was so closely bound by all his early days.

His was a dreary life, a monotonous work, a hard task, a slight reward, a dim prospect. Amos: a burden; the name expressed it all.

II.—THE BURDEN OF HIS DIFFICULT OFFICE

The office was that to which God called him from the flocks and herds and figs; the prophetic office. Heavy as was the burden of his early life, heavier still seems the new burden which Jehovah placed on him by His call. Easier far it is to bear the burden

of pressing want, of scant supply, of small comforts and perplexing cares, of contention with bears and lions that made incursions on the flocks and herds, than to do what now God calls on him to perform. The mission of Amos was one of the most trying to which any prophet was ever called. Three things made this official burden heavy.

1. The Natural Disqualifications of the Man.—His own words are: I am no prophet: I am no son of a prophet. He did not belong to any of the prophetic schools. He had not enjoyed any special training for the work. There were schools of the prophets scattered here and there over the land, where young men were taught and trained in the ordinary duties of the prophetical office. Amos had not looked upon their walls, nor crossed their thresholds, nor breathed their inspiring air.

Jonah was a sort of prime minister, who might not fear to face a king. Joel, if not a priest, was accustomed to the magnificent Temple with its ornaments of ivory and gold, the scene of imposing rites and splendid ceremonies. But Amos was a day laborer. Coarse was his raiment. Brawny were his hands. Bronzed was his weather-beaten face. Worst of all, uncultured were his mind and manners. God said to him, as He singled him out from his fellow herdmen, go prophesy. He who calls can qualify for the work to which he calls. The herdman, by taste and habit disinclined, drew back. God with greater power called. Amos obeyed.

2. The Field to Which Amos Is Called.—This makes the burden doubly heavy. Go prophesy to

Israel. Judah and Israel are arrayed in jealousy, and are most intensely antagonistic to each other. A prophet's work is hard enough at best and anywhere, called as he is to condemn, reprove, and warn. But doubly hard it is to cross the boundaries of one's native land, to enter a kingdom arrayed in enmity and jealousy toward one's own, and hurl at such the thunderbolts of Jehovah's wrath. Amos lived in Judah. God said to him: Go prophesy to Israel. Get you up from your quiet country home, and, plain and uncultured as you are, enter Israel's land, stand on Israel's soil, and tell to Israel the solemn judgments of the Lord. Did it not seem hard? Could not God raise up a man in Israel to prophesy against Israel? Is it necessary to call the humble herdman from his Tekoan tent and toil to perform so distasteful and difficult a task? The herdman, like Moses of old, drew back. God with greater power called. Amos obeyed.

3. The State of Israel at the Time.—This makes the matter worse. The more desperate the people and the heavier the judgments, the more disagreeable will be the task and the more perilous the mission. What was the social and religious condition of the kingdom of Israel at the time when Amos, commissioned of God, dared to stand by the altar at Bethel and pronounce Heaven's judgments on Israel? To this question the book of Amos affords an ample answer. The prophet gives a vivid sketch of the fearful sins that prevailed throughout the kingdom. There were violence and robbery in the palace of the king. The winter houses and the summer houses and

the houses of ivory were debauched with crime. The poor were oppressed, the needy crushed, the prevailing cry was for intoxicating drink. Theirs are manifold transgressions and theirs are mighty sins. They afflict the just. They take a bribe. They defraud the poor. It is an evil time. They lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches. They eat lambs of the flock and calves of the stall. They deny themselves no luxuries. They dance to the sound of the viol. They invent new instruments of music. They drink wine in bowls. They anoint themselves with chief ointments. But they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph. Pampered, drunken, surfeited, unconcerned.

There is more in the picture Amos has drawn, but surely this will suffice. These lines are darkly drawn. The land was beautiful. The mountains, valleys, plains, and water-courses, the harvest fields, the vineyards, orchards, were exquisitely arrayed in external charms by the touch of God's generous hand. The kingdom externally was prosperous. But the hearts of the people had turned from God and right and truth and purity and love.

The storm was gathering, the judgment drawing near. But who would choose to tell the infatuated people of their hastening doom? What brave heart will undertake the task? Can the man be found who will take his life in hand, and face the fury of the maddened multitude, and tell them of impending judgment? No one would choose the mission. Over the Tekoan hills the divine Spirit hovers. Into one of those black tents He enters. A herdman's heart

is thrilled. There is a whisper to his ear. A call he hears. From higher than the highest hill it comes. A heavenly voice says: Go prophesy unto Israel. When the morning dawns on Tekoan herdmen one of their number has enlisted in a nobler cause, to do a greater work. Amos has heard the call, and has obeyed.

III.—THE BURDEN OF HIS PROPHECY

Prophetic judgments are called burdens. The prophecies of Amos are well called burdens, not only because of the meaning of his name, but also because of the heavy judgments they contain and convey. There are several preliminary judgments which he pronounces on surrounding nations, and even on his own people of Judah. But the chief burden of his message Israel must bear. To that this study now must turn.

The prophecies of Amos are largely acted. They constitute a series of scenes, to comprehend which it is essential to keep pace with the prophet's movements, to listen and to look.

Without delay, it may readily be supposed, Amos gets ready for his prophetic pilgrimage. He promptly girds up his herdman's plain garments, and with shepherd's staff in hand is ready for the appointed work of God. Content with coarse and common raiment, he goes to stand before the king and courtiers of the northern kingdom. From the roaming cattle and the pasturing flocks and the ripening figs he turns obedient to the heavenly call. He reaches Bethel, which becomes the seat of his

principal prophetic work. Bethel! Not now the rustic place it was long years before when on its height Abraham said to Lot: See, the whole land is before thee. Separate from me. Not the quiet place it was when Jacob slept on its rocky height, and beheld angelic visions there. Not the rural village it was when Samuel went his circuit to Gilgal, Mizpeh, and Bethel. It has been transformed. It is now a royal city. Palatial homes adorn its streets. Mansions decorated with gold and ivory crown its hills. Luxuries abound. There in the center of the city is the rival altar; there the calf of gold.

How shall Amos begin his work? How shall he gain attention? What words shall he employ to deliver the burden with which he is charged? On every hand there is the evidence of strength. Yet his message is that the kingdom shall become a heap of ruins. What prospect is there of its weakness and its fall? There is little ceremony about the Tekoan prophet. He is a man of straight lines and square dealing. He goes forthwith up to the imposing altar, in the presence of the golden calf and the brilliantly attired priests. There stands the brave hero, a herdman unabashed among the élite of the royal city. What has this untutored man to say? The prophet begins. Mark his consummate skill and tact in his advance. He maneuvers well. He seems to be weakness attacking strength.

He draws a picture for them to look upon. With well-chosen words he paints a mountain cedar, tall and vigorous, covered with rich foliage, strong as oaks of yonder Bashan. There is strength unques-

tioned and complete. A portentous storm gathers its dark clouds over the landscape and vents its fury on the monarch of the forest. It sways, falls, is torn up branch and root. It is utterly destroyed. Just under the picture he writes a motto: "Flight shall perish from the swift: he shall not stand that handleth the bow: neither shall the swift of foot nor the rider of the horse deliver himself." Surely this herdman, however plain, has a message to deliver. Men listen when there is something to listen to. No scholar is needed to interpret a prophecy like this, written on nature's face, on the stormcloud and on the forest tree. Any laborer will say that it means that, though evil doers entrench and fortify themselves, they shall fall when the storm breaks on them. They and their strength shall go. Israel may take warning. The plain Tekoan has made one point, and has made it well. He has caught the people's ear and eye. He has engraved one lesson deeply on their minds; their strength, however great, may be but weakness in disguise.

Another picture Amos gives. In it there is something of the prophet's home, the frontier fortress and signal station of Judah's kingdom. There is also something of Bethel, that stands guard over Israel's southern border. He paints a frontier fortress, a signal station, on the border of a kingdom. An enemy approaches in the distance, steadily advancing. A trumpet is lifted and turned toward the interior of the kingdom. Blast after blast is sounded. The note of warning reaches the royal capital, and the people are alarmed. Why do they fear? An

enemy draws near. Do they not hear the trumpet blast that gives the warning? Now, says the fearless Amos, listen to the trumpet which to-day is sounded on your ears. Every note tells that Jehovah comes with His judgments on this land. Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.

The first prophetic note of the great Assyrian captivity of Israel is sounded here on Bethel's height by the humble Amos. Joel had not described the rising stormcloud. To Amos its black outline was just discernible above the line of Bashan's heights. Amos points to the dark outline and says: "Ye shall go beyond Damascus when your kingdom falls." Now comes an awful picture of that day. The host has come and conquered. The city is delivered to the invading foe. A foreign soldiery tramps the streets. Pestilence has followed in the train of war. Death—death—death on every hand, in every house. If there are ten men in one house, those who escape one calamity perish by another. Here comes a man, stealthily and in the shadow of the night, to burn the bones of his kinsman. He comes out of the house. He sees someone standing in the shadow near. He asks: "Is there any yet with thee?" In sad voice the answer comes: "None! Hold thy tongue. Make not mention of Jehovah's name. He has forsaken us!"

The people spellbound gaze and listen at the enchanting yet terrible eloquence of the Tekoan prophet. He signs their death warrant; but he does it grandly. The boldness and earnestness of the rugged orator sway the multitude. As he stands

there, the center of so strange a scene, three visions are unfolded to the prophet, and then by the prophet to the crowd of listeners.

First, an autumn scene. He sees a multitude of grasshoppers ready to devour all the grass of the land. A terrible judgment it is to have the meadows all laid bare. The more so, for the king has claimed the first crop for himself. It is now the time for the latter growth after the royal mowing has been done. It is the common people's portion after royalty has swept its rich treasures into its ample granaries and barns. The prophet prays: "O Lord, forgive." God said: "It shall not be." A heavenly hand blotted the picture out.

A second picture takes its place. The Lord stands upon a wall with something in His hand. The wall is very straight and very exact. "Amos, what seest thou?" "A plumbline." "I will set a plumbline in the midst of my people Israel. I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with a sword." Bold man is he to take such words and thunder them at Jeroboam's palace door.

A priest of the golden calf, Amaziah, who ministered at Bethel, sends word to Jeroboam of the prophet's treasonable words. If treasonable, why does not the priest send him forthwith away? Though surrounded by his minions, he feared the solitary man of God. Then before royal guards arrive to drive away this heroic man, the priest draws near to Amos and says: "O seer, go flee away into the land of Judah. Prophesy no more at Bethel. This is the king's chapel. It is the king's court;

the seat of religion and royalty." Amos is not to be frightened by such a flourish of diplomatic words. He is not afraid of all the royal guard.

A third vision, and Amos retires from the troubled scene. It transpires right in the presence of the priest. "Amos, what seest thou?" "A basket of summer fruit." The fruit is mellow, well ripened, none immature. Israel is ripe. The end is near. Soon the distant people will come and gather the fruit even ready to fall into their hands. They shall be enriched. The land shall be left desolate.

The only bright scene among the prophet's visions is the last. The only cheerful note is that with which the prophet closes his message and concludes his song. Lifted, it would seem, to even some loftier height than Bethel, his far-seeing eye discerns the waiting glories that shall crown Israel when their mourning days are ended. Behold the bright days come, seen even now in the dim distance. They are coming, though they are far. What are they like, Amos? Now observe whether the gifted seer by all his wonderful experience has lost anything of his early taste and fondness for the charm of rural life and humble surroundings. What are those bright days like, Amos? They are days of happiness and plenty. The plowman is overtaking the reaper. So abundant are the harvests that ere the reaper gets his sheaves all in, so many and so heavy are they, the plowman presses him for room. The vineyards of the hills are melting into wine. The men of Israel are making gardens, and are eating the fruit thereof. Israel, long captive and downtrodden, is

at home again. But the scene is far away.

The prophet's work is done. His message is delivered. Whether wounded unto death and carried home to die, a martyr to the truth and to the faithfulness of his service; or whether unharmed by human hands he in peace returned to his Tekoan hills, it cannot be positively stated. But humble as he came, so with becoming humility he concludes his work. As he retires from the scene he is lost to human view among the herdmen of Tekoa. A bold prophet of the Lord, to him belongs a faithful prophet's great reward.

IV

HOSEA

"Hosea the son of Beeri."—HOSEA 1: 1.

NOT more unlike are Joel and Amos than Hosea is unlike both of them. The book of Joel is a poem that glides along with gentle, easy flow. The book of Amos glows with rugged, stirring eloquence. Hosea's book may be called a rhapsody. It appears to be just what the word rhapsody signifies: threaded odes; beautiful, earnest, fervid thoughts strung together, whose only connection seems their close proximity. Thus it seems to be. Connection there doubtless is; but it is difficult to find. Many of the most familiar verses of the Bible, verses that are like household words, often quoted and well known, are flowers culled from this charming garden of Hosea. These isolated sayings, beautiful Bible truths, charming gems, are often used by those who little think of the scource from which they are derived. They are treasures dug out of Hosea's mine. Read the book, and see how many such treasures there are. Yet Hosea as a book is perhaps one of the least read of all the Bible books. Open the Bible and see if Hosea's pages are not among the cleanest, and Hosea's leaves among the least worn with thumbing

of them all. For this there is a reason. Hosea is perhaps the obscurest book of all the Hebrew bards. He who reads it and rereads it, and attempts to make a thorough analysis of its scope and contents, will most likely fail to satisfy himself. This is the usual experience of those who study Hosea's book. The commentators differ widely among themselves. They do not agree in their analysis of the book. It is difficult to find the thread that strings these pearls of precious thought; but the pearls themselves are there.

There are three reasons for this obscurity. First, the book is rather a collection of odes, sung at different times, than one inspired song. Years sometimes roll between its verses, of which there is scarcely an intimation given. The brief book covers a period of seventy years. Hosea's official life was longer than that of any other of God's prophets. He was a prophet seventy years. His book is but the gathered fragments of his prophecies. His book might be truly called "Gathered Fragments," or "Flashes of Prophetic Thought." The gray-haired seer, when his active life is over, sits down in quietness and pens for the ages that are still to be, hints of his prophecies, rather than the full prophecies themselves.

Second, there is also discernible an individual peculiarity of Hosea's self that crops out in his style. It is not simply brevity of style, nor simple terseness, but an unusual absence of the coupling words of sentences, the connecting particles of language; those modest little words, oft disregarded,

without which, however, the vehicle of thought is motionless. The sentences are there; but the "ands," "buts," "therefores," are very sparsely scattered over the pages. That is a peculiarity of the Hebrew language. That peculiarity is in Hosea intensified. Hence, it is said, there never has been and cannot be a satisfactory translation of this book.

Third, the intense feeling everywhere evident in this book adds to its obscurity. It is emotional from first to last. It is the gushing forth of a heart that is agitated with profoundest feeling. No one can analyse the outpourings of an anguished heart. No one can link together with the bands of logic the fervid cries of a soul that is consumed with an inward fire. Just put the exclamation point after each glowing utterance, and let it stand alone. The book of Hosea is a series of fervid exclamations. Take them by themselves. The only connection between the first verse and the last, a connection which runs through all, is intensest earnestness: an earnestness which knows no abatement and no chill through seventy years.

The beauties of this book are like the beauties of the far-famed coral isles that peer above the ocean surface. They are arrayed in beautiful luxuriance, but separated from one another by the swelling sea. They seem to have no connection. But their connection does exist down amid the deep waters, which no human eye can penetrate. All that one can do is to sail from isle to isle, admire their beauties, catch the delicious odors of the flowers that bloom—and delight one's self with that which overtops the

waters and comes within easy reach; and find pleasure even though it be in the beauty of isolated scenes. Amos is a book to read at one sitting; Hosea rather to occupy a leisure moment now and then, to discern a beauty here and there; or, bee-like, from this flower or that to sip the sweetness that exudes. It is time now to seek an introduction to the man himself. Consider Hosea's Sphere, Hosea's School, Hosea's Service.

I.—HOSEA'S SPHERE

Where were spent these seventy years of official life? Hosea is emphatically and in a higher sense than any other prophet Israel's prophet. Jonah was of Israel; but he was sent to Nineveh. Amos prophesied to Israel, but for a short time only, and he came from Judah and returned to Judah, and prophesied somewhat also against other nations. Hosea was born and reared in Israel. In Israel he lived. In Israel he died. For Israel he toiled. To Israel he prophesied. He knew no other home. He records not one prophetic word concerning any other nation than his own. He never mentions another nation except in a way that had reference to his own. In this respect he is unlike all the other prophets. There is not the slightest difficulty in marking out the boundaries of his field. The realm of Israel is his sphere. He is born and reared in Beth-Shemesh on the borders of the valley of Jezreel in the tribe of Issachar. The scene which daily engaged his eye was the loveliest valley of the land, the valley of Jezreel, clothed with nature's beauties, and marked

with the blood of Israel's victories and defeats. Like a true son of Issachar, the prophet loved his home, loved his country, loved the pursuits of peace. All his allusions to the various places in his country, its hills and vales and mountains and streams, are touched with the glow of an enthusiast. It is not too much to say Hosea loved every historic scene and every natural beauty in that land of mountains and vales, playing fountains and dashing streams, fields and flowers. He speaks of them fondly. His language breathes his love.

In striking contrast with this quiet beauty of the outer world was Israel's state, when Hosea lived and prophesied. His checkered life spans well-nigh a hundred years: the darkest hundred years in Israel's history. Jonah saw the kingdom in its glory. Amos appeared as it for a moment poised upon its pinnacle and then began its sad decline. For Hosea it was rseerved to see his native kingdom rushing headlong and with accelerating speed toward the waiting gulf of ruin. It was a time of anarchy, disorder, and violence. Hosea graphically describes the scene, as "blood touching blood." There was no intermission; no cessation of scenes of strife. The crimson tide flowed on from year to year.

Drunkenness is seen on every hand. In Amos' day it had reached the nobles and the women of the land. Hosea lifts the curtain of the royal chamber. The royal head is bowed with drink. The assassin's blade gleams in the lamp's pale light. The heavy blow is heard. The drunken king welters in his blood. His murderer wears the crown.

Dishonesty prevails. With one vivid sentence Hosea puts all that dishonesty on the page of prophecy. He says the merchants of those days carried deceitful balances in their hands. It may be true that deceitful balances were invented before Hosea's day. It may even be true that that invention is not yet among lost arts. But in Hosea's day it was the rule. Fair balances seem unknown. Deceitful scales won the premium and held their own without a rival.

Another dishonesty is noted. They made the ephah small, and the shekel great. They measured the meal and weighed the money. When they measured the meal in the ephah, they struck it off evenly on top, and made the ephah small. But when they weighed the money, they heaped it up even after the shekel said "Enough." They gave a very small ephah for a very heavy shekel!

Political animosities rent the kingdom. There were three great political parties in Israel in that day, between whose strife the country had but little rest. *First*, the rich men of the country were for peace on any terms that would not touch their purse-strings and their commercial gains. The king had just levied on them largely, and in order to make a truly royal gift, had imposed a tax of fifty shekels each on the rich men of the kingdom. They wanted time to rally from this heavy draught, and recuperate their shattered fortunes. *Second*, there was the Assyrian party. Assyria was just rising in power in the East. The kingdom of Israel was evidently waning. Many who marked the evidence

of its declining strength proposed to lean on Assyria, to invoke Assyrian aid; to be rather under the protectorate of a rising Power than to become the booty of the world; under such influence arose the Assyrian party. The Assyrian party takes the lead and puts its king upon the throne. Menahem gave Pul the Assyrian king one thousand talents to confirm his title to the throne. *Third*, there was the Egyptian party. Egypt was getting old, but still had glory left; still counted herself the mistress of the world. With restless, jealous eye she marked Assyria's rising power. A conflict between these rival powers must surely come. Israel lies between them. Egypt is old and tried; her glories have shone too long easily to be eclipsed. Hence, many advised to cast Israel's strength with Egypt, that when the conflict comes Israel may secure at Egypt's hands some of the victor's spoils. Thus was formed the Egyptian party. Backed by this party of growing strength Pekah arose and slew Menahem's son and reigned in his stead. For the first time, in the dying agonies of the kingdom, the fearless tribe of Gad ascends the throne. Pekah was slain by a member of his own party, the Egyptian party, and Hoshea, the last king of Israel, ascended the tottering throne. The best king comes last, but too late to save the reeling realm. Amid these scenes of anarchy Hosea lived and prophesied.

II.—HOSEA'S SCHOOL

Amid the stormy scenes one figure alone rises above the surging waves of trouble and corruption; one

true man is seen. It is Hosea. In solitary grandeur the prophet stands; true amid the false. A patriot, he weeps over the irremediable ruin that, coming with rapid strides, seems ready to overwhelm his native and beloved land. A prophet, he lifts his clarion voice to warn, entreat, condemn, and, in the concluding words of his message, cheer his countrymen. Now observe the school in which Hosea was fitted for his work. God works in various ways to accomplish His designs. Sometimes He qualifies His servant by a sudden inspiration; graduates him in an instant; clothes him with all needful powers without an effort of his own. Sometimes He puts His servant through a tedious school, that he may learn the elements and then the higher branches of his work. If anyone is to be God's servant, he must be willing to be, to do, to learn as God may choose. Amos was made a prophet in a night. He lay down a tired herdman; he waked with morning light inspired for his prophetic work. Hosea is trained by sad experience, and long; his trials more severe than the racks and tortures which many martyrs bore. If Amos had the hardest work to do, Hosea had the severest trial to endure. Worst of all, the school in which he is so thoroughly to be trained is in his own beloved home, in the sacred precincts of his own domestic walls. Moses was schooled for his great work in the majestic heights of Sinai, where alone he conversed with God and beheld something of the divine glory. Elijah learned his heavenly lessons in the wild ravines of Gilead, fit resort for his tameless spirit. Paul was tutored amid Arabia's rolling

hills and silent sands. All these were taught away from home. Hosea's tender, loving heart finds its school at home, by his own fireside, beside his own domestic hearth.

Look within the prophet's home. Hosea is the only prophet to whose whole family the reader of the Bible is introduced. Look within. There is Hosea, his wife Gomer, two sons and one daughter. These constitute the family: Jezreel, the oldest boy; Lo-Ruhamah, the only girl; Lo-Ammi, the youngest boy. The names seem quite peculiar. It is natural enough that the first born in that happy family should receive the name of the beautiful valley on whose verge the prophet's house is found. But there seems to be a prophecy connected with the name. The other two names are singularly formed—Lo-Ruhamah, Lo-Ammi. When the meaning of them has been learned they have a sad and melancholy sound and significence. Not-mercy, Not-my-people. What a sad significance to these little children's names! Yet by the very way in which the names are formed they may be transformed to sweetest meaning! If but the first syllable in each is dropped, how sweet the sounds—Mercy! My people! Is there not in that fact an intimation of what is now about to come? Wait and see. Amid the storms political that raged without, amid the tossings of the angry billows that rocked the nation, how did Hosea's heart delight in the quiet pleasures of his peaceful home! No strife is there. No contentions are there. No shadows, however dark without, cross the threshold of the man of God's retreat. Speak not too fast.

Judge not too soon. Draw not conclusions too hastily. When the evening comes, and the family has gathered at the hearthstone, what is the darker shadow which rests within their home? The wife and mother is gone! Not in death. It would have been far better to be by the hand of death. She has left her husband and her children and has fled away. Weeping hearts mourn over her absence. No word is now too sad to be heard in that darkened home. There are tears, and sighs, and wailings. Grief overwhelms. Follow not Gomer in her wanderings. Trace not her tracks. One thought fills the husband's mind, how can he get her back. How can he restore the lost? How can he reinstate the happiness of his family and home? How can he lift the cloud and scatter this darkness and make all bright once more? He goes in search of her. He seeks her here and there. He finds her sold into slavery; the wife of his bosom toiling in unrequited servitude. It is true, she has brought it on herself. It was but the bitter fruit of her evil wandering. But then she was his wife. His heart is thrilled with pity and with love. She scarcely dares look upon his face, whom she has wronged. But for all that he loves her tenderly in spite of wrong, and in hope of reformation. He pays down her owner's price, pays a ransom for his own; takes off her marks of servitude, arrays her in becoming robes, and leads the wanderer home. When they reach the shadowed home and cross the old familiar threshold what does the husband and the father say? It is true there is a tinge of sorrow yet in the recollection of the past, but there is hope

of brighter joy yet to come. So he says to his recovered wife "Call me no more Baali (Lord), but call me 'Ishi' (Husband). He then speaks to his children as Ruhamah and Ammi. Thus is the prophet's life in himself and in his family a prophecy. The domestic scene in the household of Bethshemesh is a picture of a larger scene in the great outer world. Thus trained by his own heart trouble, and by his own exercise of free and full forgiveness, he goes forth to his work as the prophet of tender pity and freely offered pardon and gracious love.

III.—HOSEA'S SERVICE

The great difficulty in Hosea's work was, not that the people were corrupt; though that was true. They were filled with corruption and abounded in iniquity. But the supreme difficulty was that they would not heed stern words of warning and reproof. Amos had thundered Heaven's judgments in their ears. However much they admired his heroic sternness, they turned a deaf ear to his commands, and would have none of his reproof. They were not to be *driven*, even to God. Hosea 12:10: "I have spoken by the prophets, I have multiplied visions, I have used similitudes by the ministry of the proprets." Hence, one more effort God would make to save His people. A prophet must go to them, filled with all tenderness, to woo them back to God. Amos is a storm of truth, Hosea is the gentle dew upon the meadow flowers. He is Israel's weeping prophet, to see what tears can do. He has learned to weep at

home. With a mellowed heart and unsealed fountain he stands before the people, to speak with quivering lips and melting eyes of Jehovah's love.

Israel is the wandering wife; Jehovah the loving husband. How can He bring her back to her allegiance? He will woo, and seek to win her forgotten love. But how? There is here a beautiful order just discernible even amid the obscurity of Hosea. God works by plan, even in winning human hearts. The wife is wandering; the Husband seeks to bring her back, but not against her will. Note the kind process of recovering love.

1. He Hedges up Her Wandering Footsteps.—"I will hedge up her way with thorns, and make a wall, so that she shall not find her devious paths." If her way is pleasant, she may abide in it; but if it is rough, she will think of the pleasures of her deserted home and of her waiting husband. So with an aching heart he put in her path the thorns, that will pierce her feet, and give her pain. He hedges up her way with thorns. The path of duty is often hedged about with thorns, that none may wander to the right or left without a pain. The path of sin is hedged about with thorns, that none may go on without incurring pain. Pierced by pain, and overwhelmed by darkness, she pauses, and thinks of all the joys she has left. Thus, as Hosea says, the valley of Achor becomes to her a door of hope. The valley of trouble, the valley of the aching heart, becomes the door of hope. She stops and thinks! "I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy

testimonies." Happy the moment when wanderers pause and think!

2. She Resolves.—But will she go back? Unsatisfied to stay away, will she be satisfied to go back again to her forsaken, but waiting home? Overwhelmed with all her sorrows, she at last makes the firm resolve: "I will go to my first husband, for then it was better with me than now." She resolves. But in the very act of forming her resolution and atempting to act on it, she first finds that she is chained; first sees that hers is a helpless, hopeless slavery.

3. The Ransom Is Paid.—In her despairing grief there comes a well-known voice, a voice of former days and happier memories. It breaks gently on her ear. It is not the cruel master's stern command that often made her tremble in her hard servitude. It is a tender husband's loving accent, "speaking to her heart." It is no dream. It is no delirious fancy. It is sweet, heart-satisfying, comforting reality. These fetters! How they bind! Can they be broken? There comes the welcome voice: "Return and welcome! If thou wilt, thou shalt. Although thou canst not of thyself, yet I that call can break thy bonds and make thee free." Forthwith the ransom is paid. The shackels fall! The slave is free! To her through the vale of trouble is opened the door of hope, and she enters in: and finds herself at Home, home of forgiveness, new happiness and unremembering love.

Such is Hosea's sermon to wayward Israel; won-

derfully filled with tender and appealing and assuring love. See the man of God weeping. Entreaty is engraved on every feature of his holy face. Earnestness consumes his loving heart. His spirit is all aglow with heavenly fire. Forgetful of self, one thought, one purpose, fills his mind, as he pleads with Israel, "Come back to God," "Come back to your forsaken home."

But the sermon fails. Israel is no more to be drawn than driven. Hosea, equally with Amos, must review a fruitless ministry, fruitless of visible results. O thou nation, if thou wilt, then thou shalt surely perish! Hosea pictures the nation now as dead. The blow has been dealt; the nation has fallen; is dead; is buried. Upon the single, simple slab that marks the nation's grave this epitaph is deeply inscribed by Hosea's hand. Read it and ponder it in solemn thought: "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself."

Now comes the best part of this deeply interesting and strangely fascinating book. There comes a voice from the spirit world over this new-made grave wherein a nation lies. Though Israel's pulse has ceased to beat, and Israel's heart no longer throbs with potent life, though Israel is cold in the embrace of death; yet hear the words that are divinely spoken: "I will ransom them from the power of the grave! I will redeem them from death! O death, I will be thy plagues! O grave, I will be thy destruction." Can the dead arise? Can the buried kingdom once more appear?

The aged seer, whose life had spanned a hundred

years, whose whitened locks adorn his noble brow, once more stands up, with unnatural strength, with tremulous voice of age, strains his dimmed vision, and descries through the long vista the future glories of his beloved land. "God will be as the dew to Israel." The sweetest peroration of all the bards! "Israel shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon. His branches shall spread. His beauty shall be as the olive tree. His fragrance as Lebanon. Ephraim shall say, what have I to do any more with idols? I am like a green fir tree. From me is the fruit found."

The illustrious bard has ceased his long toil. His checkered life now rests in peace. His body in the grave, his noble spirit caught up to heavenly joys, he can with patience await the coming glories of his well-beloved but wayward land!

V

NAHUM

"Nahum the Elkoshite."—NAHUM 1: 1.

NAHUM the Elkoshite next invites consideration. This marks a slight deviation from a strictly chronological order. Isaiah and Micah both began their prophetic service earlier than Nahum did, and might therefore seem to demand an earlier consideration. But two reasons have induced this deviation. First, while the order of the beginning of their official lives is Isaiah, Micah, Nahum, they all seem to have closed their ministries in the same year. It seems preferable to begin with the shorter ministry and proceed to the longer. Therefore the order of their study will be: Nahum, Micah, Isaiah. Second, Nahum completes a circle of prophets in Israel, and therefore most appropriately immediately follows Hosea. The force of this reason will be intensified in the unfolding of the subject in these studies. Nahum and his book present a three-fold division for the present study: the seer, the scene, and the shout.

I.—THE SEER

There is an eminent propriety in calling Nahum the seer, or the one who sees, for his book is called

The Vision, and there is a remarkable vividness in his style. He writes as one who clearly sees what he writes about. Concerning this seer consider:

1. His Name.—The student of the Bible has sojourned with these Hebrew worthies long enough to know it is always worth his while to inquire not only what the name is, but what it signifies. Hebrew names not only designate the person, but often give glimpses of the character and destiny as well. How this comes about may not be known. Whether sometimes by accident, or by a prevision, or by environment, or by divine control, it is needless to inquire. The fact, however, scarcely can be questioned. Through the hero's name the light of history often shines. Pause here an instant and catch a ray. Here is a name written once, and only once, by the pen of inspiration. What does it mean? It has a somewhat double meaning. It is not ambiguous. Its meaning points in two directions. It comes from a root that means to sigh, and it signifies consolation and vengeance. Neither consolation nor vengeance alone would rightly represent this name. If these two words are taken and blended, as rays of light are blended, until the words are merged, the meaning will be a consolation which comes through avenging judgment. A prophet's name could not be more admirably and beautifully adapted to a prophet's work than Nahum's name is to Nahum's work. The Book of Nahum is a perfect alternation of heavenly vengeance on Israel's foes and comfort to Israel's sorrowing heart.

So much for the meaning of this name. There is

also something of interest in its sound. It is a very brief word; but there is power locked up even in its brevity. Its sound conveys its sense. Those who are familiar with Homer, and love to trace the hexameters of the blind old bard of Greece, know well what this rhetorical figure is. They remember how the old poet throws into his verse the very sound of the waves that break along the shore. Thus the poet's verse becomes the echo of nature's song. Such is Nahum. It means a sigh, and it sounds a sigh. It is interesting, too, to note that in his brief book are several instances of like happy play upon the sound of words, one of the most refined adornments of an author's style. This pleasing echo of sound to sense is of course lost in the English version. The music of a language cannot be conveyed by translation, however learned, however accurate.

2. His Home.—Where did Nahum live and prophesy? Two theories there are about his home. He is an Elkoshite, a man of Elkosh. Unfortunately for the settlement of this question there are two villages named Elkosh; one in Galilee, one in Assyria. Hence there are two theories.

In Galilee.—It is affirmed that when the kingdom of Israel fell and the Israelites were carried captive to the Assyrian land, Nahum escaped from the Galilean Elkosh and fled to Judah, and there lived and prophesied. There at a safe distance he hurled his thunderbolts of judgment against the walls of Nineveh.

Elkosh in Assyria.—The other theory, which seems more plausible, is that he went with his captive

people and abode in captivity in the great Assyrian land in the Assyrian Elkosh. He is therefore Israel's only exiled bard. His is the only prophetic voice that comes back from Israel's captivity. It is likely that Nahum has an interest in each Elkosh, and may with peculiar appropriateness be called "the Elkoshite." The Assyrian Elkosh is most likely the reproduction in name at least of the Galilean town. How natural it would be for the Elkoshites of Galilee to call their new settlement in the land of exile by the name that brings up memories of home. The new states of this country are dotted with the familiar names that tell whence the people's footsteps came, and whither the people's hearts go back. It may readily be concluded that Nahum lived in Elkosh in Galilee, and when he was led away an exile to a foreign land he, with others with him, named the place of his abode Elkosh, in memory of their distant home. This will account for the fact that to-day each of these two villages claims him as its own. But it will not account so easily for the other fact, that each village is prepared to show the curious, credulous traveler the tomb where Nahum's bones are said to rest. In passing it is well to note that Capernaum means the village of Nahum. Where was the prophet's home? He had no permanent home. His was not the joy to dwell in an earthly home. In this he was like his greater Master. The sweetness, joy, comfort, of a home to him in his prophetic life were memories; not fading, but distant memories.

3. His Time.—When did Nahum live and prophesy? He is the last of Israel's prophets. Thus far

the prophetic fire has burned almost in Israel alone. Thus far one prophet alone has risen in Judah's realm—Joel. Four have appeared in Israel—Jonah, Amos, Hosea, Nahum. These are all. Henceforth the student of prophecy must go to Judah, and follow Judah's destinies alone. Four stars appear in Israel's galaxy. They form a bright circle of glorious light. Each has its place to fill, and fills it well. Each marks an epoch in Israel's history. Jonah, by his mission, saves Nineveh, his country's future greatest foe. Amos marks the looming power of Nineveh, rising steadily and darkly like an eastern cloud over the lofty sky-line of Bashan's rugged mountain range. Hosea tells of conquering Nineveh and captive Israel. One chapter more is needed to complete the scene. That chapter Nahum gives. He lives to predict and see the haughty tyrant slain, his scepter broken, his jewels scattered in the dust, Israel's conqueror laid low.

4. His Book.—Nahum's little book is called the Burden of Nineveh. There is in it a grand, concentrated unity of aim. One subject fills Nahum's mind. One nail he drives. Every blow strikes it squarely, and sends it home. All literature scarcely affords a better specimen of converging thought than this brief prophetic poem of Israel's Exile bard. It is unity itself. Can anyone bring fire from yonder distant sun? Yes; if he will but converge the rays that so feebly fall upon the world, converge them on one glowing point, he will bring a flame from those mild rays which now fail to melt the snow and ice or absorb the moisture of the dew. It is the power of

concentration and unity of design and effort. It is in this convergence and unity Nahum excels. He is wonderfully vivid in his style. He is terse and strong. The prophet makes you see what he sees. This book is well called The Vision of Nahum. Not the visions; but the vision. It is one unbroken vision. And such a vision! Nahum sees; and he makes others see with Nahum's eyes.

There is something peculiarly attractive in the allusions with which Nahum adorns his style. Mountains and meadows there were in the Assyrian land; mountains rising in their snow-capped grandeur, and valleys spread in luxuriant beauty at the mountain's base. But it is not such ornaments as these the patriot prophet uses to convey his thought. He goes back in memory to Israel's land and gathers his flowers there. He speaks of Bashan, Carmel, and Lebanon, and no doubt thinks them more glorious than many others think them, more glorious than they really are. Absence shuts the eye to all that mars the picture, and love helps the memory to brighten every scene. Here then one glimpse is caught of Exile life; the exile fondly cherished the memory of his lost and ruined home.

Yet note this other fact. Nahum mentions its mountains only—Bashan, Carmel, Lebanon. Why is this? Is it but a fancy? May not this be the reason? At least it is a suggestion deserving thought. As the captives were led away from their land they doubtless glanced at this object and at that as each receded from their longing, loving gaze. Thus one familiar object and another is lost to view in the

dimming distance. But some figures in the landscape seem almost to follow them. The great familiar mountains lift high their heads as if to trace the pathway trodden by the weary captives who had lived upon their sides and around their bases. Through the clear, transparent Eastern atmosphere they seem to be almost at hand. At last they too disappear.

Three only overtop the rest, and stand forth in their bold relief. Which are they? Bashan, Carmel, and Lebanon. But even they cannot be always seen. At last the band of captives come to some point in their sad journey beyond which even these great landmarks are veiled from view. Their last vision of their home land: Bashan, Carmel, and Lebanon, arrayed in luxuriant beauty and enshrined in the exile's heart. It was a last view of home. No wonder it was pictured in unfading lines and living colors on their hearts. When Nahum takes up his pen to write, and seeks to gather beauties from his land of birth and happiness, it is the last scene that is freshest and is dearest, and the prophet writes of Bashan, Carmel, and Lebanon. It is the cherished memory of life's earliest, brightest, happiest scenes, and the last vision of them ere they forever fade from his view.

II.—THE SCENE

The book of Nahum has been caled a shout. If there is anything that cannot be conveyed by words beyond the scene which called it forth, it is a shout. But the sound is not the shout. It is the inspiration

of the scene that gives life to the sound and makes it a thrilling and awakening shout. Merely to listen to Nahum's words apart from the circumstance that called them forth is to lose their fire and to miss their true significance. Enter Nahum's company. Be stirred by the same exciting scenes amid which he lived. Then listen to his shout. There are two pictures in this scene portrayed by Nahum's vivid words: one bright, the other deeply dark. Look on them as they are presented by the prophet.

1. Nineveh.—Nineveh is in its glory. It is the palmiest day of this great city of the East. Its long accumulating glories now are crowned. The city shines with regal splendor and rests in absolute security. Its builder boasted that he would build a city that would eclipse all other earthly glories. Truly, he well-nigh attained his wish. In queenly magnificence the city rests on the eastern bank of the far-famed Tigris. It is enclosed with sixty miles of walls. The western wall is built along the river bank. The walls are one hundred feet high. Three chariots can drive abreast upon this elevated highway. Fifteen hundred towers, each two hundred feet high, fortify these mighty walls. Within the city are castles and gardens and broad avenues. Around the north, east, and south sides, outside the walls, there is a moat two hundred feet wide, that can be flooded with water, and thus can give strength to the city against the most powerful invader, from whatever direction he may come. Hence Nahum says, "Nineveh is like a pool of water," an inaccessible isle in a great pool of water. The city is in the perfection of

its architectural beauty. Up its marble stairs, along its painted halls, through its splendid avenues, there daily move great processions of the crowned, the princely, and the noble, the brave, the fair. Parks and gardens abound on every side around the palaces and mansions of the great rich.

Such was Assyria's capital in its palmy days. Immeasureable wealth and prosperity it possessed. Its greatness, however, was built not on commerce and industry alone, nor largely, but on rapine, blood, war, and plunder. There is in the British Museum what is called "The Black Obelisk." It is a relic from the ruins of Nineveh. It has brought to the world to-day through two thousand years the story of Nineveh's tyrannic power. It is a tablet of black marble six feet and a half in height, with scenes of Assyrian oppression of their provinces. Among these inscriptions are recognized Israel's features, dress, and names.

2. Israel.—Israel in her degradation is the dark companion picture. The captives dwell in sadness. The glitter and pomp of Nineveh's royalty only intensify the picture of their sorrows and their woes. Theirs is a fallen greatness. Theirs are blighted prospects and disappointed hopes. With broken fortunes they are called to live among the people who wrought their downfall and amid the splendors that are built upon their ruin! That indeed is hard to bear. What hope have those captives of release? None! Absolutely none! Nineveh is strong. What must have been the feeling of these captives toward their tyrant masters?

Samson, blind and in cruel and abject captivity, weary of his saddened life and exasperated by his severe ordeal, was willing to kill himself if with his death ruin might overtake his foes. So he summoned all his strength and drew down the pillars of the idol temple, and perished in its fall, but rejoiced to die amid his dying foes.

Israel is in bondage. What must be the strong feeling that stirs Israel's heart? Surely Israel will most rejoice to see her enemies laid low and her masters humbled, even if her own fetters bind them still. But may she hope for this? Nineveh is growing stronger every year. The weeping exiles pray to God for help. They do not call in vain. Who in penitence and faith and want has ever lifted up his earnest cry to God in vain? Their sorrows, their tears, their prayers, all plead mightily with God. Heaven hears. The very men who were brought captive from Israel and were humbled in the presence of their conqueror live to see their proud conqueror fall.

One recent event had tended to give the captives hope. This fact Nahum seizes and uses with great effect. The great city Thebes of Egypt, or as Nahum calls it "No-Ammon," or populous "No," had just fallen. Thebes that was built on both sides of the Nile, whose magnificent remains are yet found in the temples of Luxor and Karnac, glorious Thebes, had fallen. Is Nineveh better or stronger or more secure than populous No? The captive hoped, though he could not well define his hope, that Nineveh might fall.

God passes by the splendors of Nineveh's regal court and hovers over the exiles' village Elkosh. The mighty God writes His will upon an exile's heart. Nahum, the Elkoshite, moved by the power of God's call, goes forth to do God's bidding, and hurls Heaven's judgment against Nineveh's huge gates.

III.—THE SHOUT

The prophet's cry may well be called a shout; a prediction of an enemy's overthrow; so vivid that it seems already to have come. If any prophet was called to a work agreeable to his nature, taste, and circumstances, surely none more so than Nahum. Held captive by an imperious foe, he is bidden of God to arise and pronounce his haughty captor's hastening doom. There are expressed no regrets at undertaking this work; no regrets in its execution. There is no Tarshish whose distant shore invites this prophet to make escape from God's command. It would be too much to expect regret in circumstances such as these. Many without a call from Heaven undertake, with pleasure too, to pronounce the doom of all their foes. Then let the exiled prophet sing, as he prophesies. There is method in his song. Note it as he proceeds. Think of him as standing alone, an exile, in the shadow of those mighty walls. How unlikely is his prophecy to be fulfilled!

First.—He shouts of God's providence. A charming song it is. It cannot be excelled. Its beauties are unrivaled. Take one thought. "God's way is in the whirlwind and the storm, and the clouds are

the dust of his feet." There may be anarchy, like the whirlwind and the unruly storm and the portentous clouds; but there is order in it all. God is that order. Truly, this is a noble text for the prophet to begin his sermon with: an overruling providence.

Second.—A gentle whisper the prophet speaks to God's anxious, troubled people. The storm of wrath is coming; but not on captive Israel. "I will break his yoke from off thee, and will burst thy bonds in sunder." These two are preliminary thoughts: God rules, let His people not be afraid.

Third.—The doom of Nineveh is now pronounced. No sooner are God's people comforted than the heavy burden falls where it is designed to rest. Several things about this doom deserve a notice. The agencies are flood and fire. Whence can a flood come? Year by year the Tigris flows by these walls. The ripple of its waters utter no threat; its majestic flow makes music as it passes by. Yet the prophet speaks of flood and fire! Hear him again. The image gods will be cut off. Nineveh prided itself on its idol gods. What arm is strong enough to lay low the city's splendid idols? Nahum seems to get beside himself. He seems to see a conquering power, and bids it come and take the city's silver and the city's gold. As the Ninevites are routed, some brave souls among them try to rally their fleeing comrades by a call to stand. But no, they will not even look back, so utter is their rout, so sudden and overwhelming is their flight.

Such idle cries of an exile bard attract no notice in great Nineveh. Its busy scenes go on. Its com-

merce is unstayed by a poet's song. Its industries receive no check from the call of an Israelitish bard. Its princes and its nobles have scarcely heard, perhaps, of Nahum and his song. The wheels of government are working. Mirth and revelry play their gleeful part. Wealth procures its costly luxuries. Tribute pours into the royal treasury from a hundred provinces. It is as if the prophet never had spoken! Wait on God! God is in no haste to execute His plans.

The Medes and Babylonians have joined against Nineveh. The rumbling of their chariots is heard like thunder over the distant hills—nearer and nearer, like the rising storm. Painted red, and glittering with steel, Nahum says they looked like torches on the hills around. The fir tree spears glisten as they are brandished in the sunlight. The foe has come. But Nineveh trembles not. Her gates are locked. Nineveh is secure. Her moat is filled with water. Like an isle, she sits amid the spreading waters and is defiant of her foes. What can the chariots do? What can the spears do? What can the scarlet uniforms do? What can the brave soldiers do? Nineveh can stand a siege.

Rather ask, What can God not do? It was said to be a tradition handed down in Nineveh that the city would never be taken by a foe until the river should become her enemy. The river begins to rise, while the Medes and Babylonians camp around. Why does it rise? Who knows? Was it the melting snows or the winter rains, or a miracle of God? It makes no difference now—nor then. The fact is

known. The river rises higher and higher and still higher. It becomes a flood in its proportions and creates a scene of desolation. There is a crash as when an Alpine avalanche starts in its terrible descent, so terrible and prolonged. Look again. The western wall of the strong city, that wall that was built above the river bank, has been undermined by the swollen river, has toppled over, and has fallen into the surging stream! Let not yet the shout of triumph sound! This is a flood, but where is the fire? Go to the royal palace. When the king saw that all was lost he gathered into one heap himself, his wives, his children, and his wealth—and with his own hand kindled the funeral pile. The fire spreads; and Nineveh is burned to ashes. The glorious city becomes a heap of smouldering ruins. Nineveh the great is fallen.

Is there none to murmur over such a fall? Is there none to shed a tear of pity over even a tyrant's death? Not one. No pen inscribes a eulogy. No voice sings in plaintive strain a dirge. Nineveh lived unloved—and died unhonored and unsung! Her glory was destroyed in a day. Her wealth was swept away by one fell blow. A shout of joy is heard. It comes from Elkosh. Nahum who foretold the terrible event; now that it has come may well repeat his thrilling words: "All that hear the report of thee shall clap their hands over thee!"—shall rejoice in thy fall.

The exile's song has long survived the royal city. Its ruins are to-day the abode of beasts and birds of evil omen. Nahum's song is yet in the freshness of

its beauty, the vigor of its strength. It ranks to-day the most magnificent shout that ever kindled human heart or fell on human ear. The mighty city has passed utterly away. The boasted strength was weakness. From its proud height it fell. The little song that seemingly in weakness echoed from the massive walls, and feebly fell back on the ears of him who sang it, instinct with a superior vitality has survived and lives still to tell the story of the goodness and severity of God. Temples and palaces built by human hands, though grand and massive, must perish. Words of wisdom, truth, and grace are eternal.

VI

MICAH

"Micah the Morasthite."—MICAH 1: 1.

MICAH prophesied during about fifty years. His book, like Hosea's, is gathered fragments of prophetic work. But, unlike Hosea's, the thread of the discourse is easily discerned. The book of Micah is one of the most systematic and regular of all the Bible books. So perfect is its order, so regular its development, that the reader cannot easily fail to mark its outline. It is clearly divided into three parts, each of which brings to view a special feature of Micah's work. Each part is introduced by the words "Hear ye." The difference of these parts is marked by the persons to whom the special address refers. There are three discourses and three audiences. Each of these parts opens with a solemn warning and closes with a joyous promise. So regularly is this book constructed, so symmetrical and beautiful a temple of truth is it, that its author may be accounted artificer and architect, like Bezaleel, Aholiab, and Hiram of an earlier day. There can be no better way of presenting the subject than to follow the clear leadings of the prophet himself, and portray Micah in the three spheres in which his three discourses are delivered.

I.—THE RUSTIC SEER AMONG THE PEOPLE

"Hear, all ye people." The peasant preacher; himself a peasant; his audience the peasant people. There is a prominent character in Old Testament history with whom Micah must not be confounded—Micaiah, a famous prophet in Ahab's day. With him Micah, the peasant preacher, is often confounded. Their names in Hebrew are the same; and what is more remarkable, the last recorded words of Micaiah of Ahab's day are those with which Micah the Morasthite begins his prophetic message. The only reason that can be suggested for this singular coincidence is that Micah intentionally adopts the words of his predecessor, thereby to attract attention and to enforce his message in its inception. The coincidence of names and words of the two messages would at once secure an audience for the message which he brings.

Look now upon a scene illumined by two bright prophetic lights. Hitherto these prophets have appeared singly. They have stood forth to view in solitary grandeur. If their lights have met and blended, yet the seers themselves have stood apart. Judah now is blessed with two of the greatest prophets at one time: Isaiah and Micah, twin stars that blend their rays, and yet the light of each is different from the other. Not more widely separated are the zenith and the nadir than Isaiah and Micah in their individualities. Isaiah is princely, refined, learned, cultured, fitted to move with grace among the élite, and noble, and princely, the counselor of

kings. Micah is rustic, rough, unpolished, blunt, and plain. In proportion as he is thus unfitted for social equality in princely sphere, he is the better suited for a humbler work among the poorer people of the land. Here are the two prophets of the day: Isaiah clothed in costly raiment and elegant attire suited to his princely lineage and sphere; Micah wrapped in coarse, scant peasant garb. The prophetic work of the day is to be devided between these two waiting servants of the Lord. How shall it be divided? The division, in the main, may be thus described, just as the division of God's work is often made in this day. The polished Isaiah, with his flowing robe, goes to Judah's court, to speak before the rich and regal. The rustic Micah goes to Judah's rural districts to stir the hearts of the plain, staunch people of the realm. The one goes to the costly palaces of Jerusalem. The other to the hills and valleys, the fields and forests, the towns and villages, of the land. Both are content to do God's will. Even though Micah is, if indeed he is, the lesser light, he is not ashamed to shine.

Micah is called the Morasthite, from Moresheth, his home. Moresheth is in Shephelah, or the lowland that stretches along the seacoast south of Sharon's flowered plain; a country rich in pasture grounds and beautified by its rolling hills that yield rich treasure of yellow grain. It is a rural farming section of the land. At Moresheth there is a monument reared to Micah's memory, called "The Faithful Monument." The country all around is adorned with luxuriant vineyards, and on its hills are seen

grazing herds and flocks. As is often the case where these are found, beasts of prey prowl about and live upon the fruits of shepherd's and herdman's work.

The only existing picture of Micah is drawn by his own hand, and is touched into finish by references to such familiar scenes as must have been daily looked upon by the Morasthites. He says: "I will wail and howl, I will go stripped and naked, I will make a wailing like the dragons, and mourning as the owls." The howling jackal dragon, the screeching owl, were all familiar to the inhabitants of Moresheth, and vividly picture Micah's nature and Micah's work among them. Far better fitted to cope with difficulties amid such scenes was the rustic Micah than elegant Isaiah.

He is sent to that rural work, and he goes. He throws all the energy of his soul into his work in the valleys and villages of the land. For the work he has an education quite his own, and likens himself to the wild denizen of the trackless forest. He becomes an itinerant prophet, and enters on his trmendous circuit, which engirdles the entire kingdom.

The prophet's style is concise even to abruptness; clear as the cut of diamond. There is no superfluity of words. Neither is there want of words to convey the sense. It may be said of Micah, as of very few writers, his words are neither too many nor too few. Each word is like an arrow that has its aim, and, when let fly, hastens to its mark. His style is preeminently clear. Also it is nervous, strong, impatient. He is rapid in his movements. His transitions are frequent and sudden and abrupt. He seems

to move with energetic quickness. He has no time to wait for those of slower pace to catch up with his glowing thoughts. It is just such a book as, when once the reader has grasped the outline of the discourse and wishes to read again to catch the glow of the author's thought, he finds himself reading more and more rapidly toward the end to keep up with the movement of the prophet's earnest thought. Yet when Micah does pause in his rapid flight, though it is but for an instant, there is in his thought a glow of fervor, in his word a power of charm. Two or three of the most sublime utterances of inspiration burst forth from Micah's message in these momentary pauses in his rapid flight.

Several sets of ornaments adorn this book of Micah. First, the allusions are all from the phenomena of nature familiar to the humble habitant of Judah's lowlands. It would take too long a time to gather up these wild flowers, scattered as they are all through the book. Only read Micah's book with an eye to catch every rustic flower that adorns its pages and every allusion that is suggested by peasant life, and be amply rewarded for the work.

Second, there are numerous instances of what is called paronomasia: a play upon the sound of words; words of different meanings, or different spelling, but of the same sound, brought together and made in some fashion to merge or mix their meanings. The book of Micah abounds with this rhetorical figure, this play of words. Specimens: "Declare it not in Gath." Gath sounds like the Hebrew word for "declare." "Weep not in Acco." Acco means weeping.

"In Aphrah roll thyself in the dust." Aphrah means dust. "I will bring the heir unto thee, O inhabitant of Mareshah." Mareshah means inheritance. A play on his own name; Micah means "who is like unto Jehovah?" In the closing paragraph of his book Micah asks the question: "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity?" Such are a few specimens of these simple, but ingenious figures which adorn the peasant Micah's book and so admirably fit him to speak with power to a peasant audience.

Third, the dialogue is a feature of this book. The formal dialogue is not often introduced in Scripture. The most formal and lengthy one perhaps is that which Micah gives, and which presently will be considered.

The peasant prophet is perhaps oftener quoted than any other writer in the sacred volume. Certainly he is quoted by a greater variety of inspired authors than any other. His words appear on the pages of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Zephaniah, and are quoted by our Lord and others in His day. Thus the torch divinely kindled, and waved by the humble Morasthite, blazes abroad through many a land, and renews its brightness through all succeeding ages. Thus admirably suited for his peculiar work, fitted by his humble birth, by his early life, by his native talents, by his unique style, the prophet enters upon his tremendous circuit. He has no time to tarry in one place; no time to seek ease or comfort or convenience. He sounds his signal note, that, trumpet-like, echoes over Judah's hills and heralds his ap-

proach: "Hear, all ye people." His address is designed for all the people, the masses, the multitude of men. Barefooted and divested of his upper garment, he runs from house to house and village to village proclaiming Heaven's judgments and Heaven's promises. His judgments are terrible. But they are like the dark stormcloud that pours out its gathered fury and then upon its dark expanse has painted the bow of beauty and of hope. So each dark and terrible denunciation becomes a background of a beautiful, bright promise of future joy. This popular address proceeds with method. In it are included divine judgment, heavenly sentence, just cause in the people's sin, and the promise of deliverance.

II.—THE RUSTIC SEER AT COURT

The second address begins: "Hear, I pray you, O heads of Jacob, and ye princes of the house of Israel." The plain Morasthite, who found the forests and fields of Judah a congenial sphere, entered it with readiness and toiled in it well, was not allowed to remain for all his ministry hidden in its humble homes and places of lowly toil. It has been already noted that Micah in the execution of his mission traveled through the rural districts of the land, half clothed, treading the trackless wood, and trudging over the upturned clods of the valleys, glad to do God's work in humblest way and by obscurest paths and with least renown. Now he will be seen to enter the royal city, and to stand unabashed before noblemen, princes, and the king. By some this might be

thought marked promotion. Micah does not so regard it because it gives access to the earthly great. It is God's work either way, whether in the fields or in the palace. There are three things to notice about the peasant-prophet's presence in the palace.

1. Why Did He Go There?—Was it because he found his field contracted and felt that he ought to have a larger sphere of work? Far from it. Surely, he had already the widest field in all the kingdom. Was it because he found his field too large and scattered, too exacting, engrossing, and diversified, affording too little time for meditation and reflection and desired a place where his work would be more concentrated? There was far too much heroic fiber in his moral make-up for such motives. Was it because he felt his abilities had grown with his country practice, and now he ought to have a metropolitan charge? Nay. However much poor, weak ministers of God may be subject to such considerations, and try to argue themselves into preferments, Micah, God's inspired servant, seems to have risen above all such unenviable motives. His mission to the city grew out of his mission to the country, and in this way: As he pronounced Heaven's judgments on the rural people, and spared them not, and laid the burden of guilt at every man's door, and told them that they were accountable for this,—and for this their sin the doom would come,—Micah found that the common people, though guilty, were not more guilty than their palatial rulers who goaded them on in their evil doing and ground them down to earth by their tyranny. The people cried to their

rulers in their want and sorrow, and their rulers heeded not their piteous cry. What therefore was to be done? Nothing but this: the people's prophet must carry the people's burden and lay it at the feet of their unjust and cruel rulers. So Micah turns from his rural circuit, enters the city gate, and knocks at the palace door. Who is there? Micah speaks: "Hear, I pray you, O heads of Jacob, and ye princes of the house of Israel."

2. What Did He See There?—What did this messenger of Jehovah see when he entered Jerusalem? What was the religious and political aspect of the city? The dusky groves of Olivet, that overlooked the city, were the shrines of heathen gods. The lowly vale of Kedron, washed by its crystal stream, was the scene of vile heathen orgies. Near the royal gardens a brazen statue reared its head, within whose brazen sides children were sacrificed. There at least one royal child had burned. Gold and silver statues glittered throughout the city. Soothsayers, fortune-tellers, self-constituted prophets, were as thick as vultures around the dead. Little altars stood at the corners of the streets. In the palace court a massive flight of steps mounted a pillar upon whose height was placed a sundial to mark the time of day by its shadows, a service connected with the worship of the sun. On the temple roof, one place at least that ought to have been exempt from heathen innovation, there were small altars for the worship of the zodiac. At the Temple entrance there were chariots dedicated to the sun and sacred white horses ready to be harnessed on great occasions. To crown all these dese-

crations, Jehovah's altar was thrust aside and a new heathen altar was erected in its stead. The great doors of the Temple were shut. The sacred lamps were not lighted. There was no incense offered. The whole interior was left to decay and neglect. Such was Jerusalem, as Micah saw it. It was surely enough to overwhelm the prophet's heart with most serious fear and oppressive sadness.

3. What Did He Say?—A new king had just ascended the throne. Hezekiah reigns. To him will Micah make his earnest appeal. The burden of his rural people's wants is now on Micah's heart. In his plain, scant garb the rough, but bold and true-hearted prophet knocks at the palace door, and gains admittance to the presence of the king. Suddenly thrust into the brilliant assemblage, with the peculiar voice which he likens to the ostrich's plaintive mourn, he addresses his brilliant and imposing audience: "Hear, I pray you, O princes of the land." He spoke some plain truths that day to his royal and princely hearers. He had not much to lose, and he had everything to gain. So he set himself to thorough work regardless of himself. A blessed thing it is for royalty to have a friend like Micah, who speaks not flattering words to please, but wholesome truths to save. They listen while plain, honest Micah tells them how they have imposed upon the people. He uses plain language. He tells them that they have flayed the people, have picked their bones, and now would cook them in the caldron and of them make a feast. He charges that when the people cried to them, they heard them not. Micah tells them that

they will cry to the greater King, who will not hear.

He turns to the brilliantly attired false prophets, who had grown rich by their smooth words, and he scathes them with burning invectives—saying that when they are fed for it, they say Peace, and when they are not fed for it they say War. All the king has to do to get a pleasant prophecy from their polluted lips is to spread a bounteous feast before them. They have deceived others, they shall themselves be deceived. The sun shall go down over them; and the days shall be dark to them. Then Micah gives a summary of his terrible invective in words that as a warning ought to be cut into the everlasting granite. "The princes judge for a reward; the priests teach for hire; the prophets divine for money. . . . Therefore, shall Zion be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of the forest."

The prophet pauses. It may be he expected there and then to shed his blood and die, as the penalty for his boldness, even recklessness. When stern eloquence has lost its spell, and the recoil comes, can he hope to escape the wrath of prophets, priests, and princes? Fortunately for him, Hezekiah is king, and while yet wicked, he is at least honest in a way and not wholly lost to reason. The king's mind is in a balance. How shall he decide—for or against Jehovah's servant? The prophet waits. The king, deeply wrought upon by Micah's homely searching words, at length decides the question. Hezekiah is by the plain, rugged Morasthite converted to Jehovah, and begins the greatest and most thorough refor-

mation that marks the history of the kingdom of Judah. How singular that he who had not been moved by Isaiah's elegance, culture, and sublimity should be touched and overpowered by the home thrusts of Micah the Morasthite!

Micah's mission to the court is, however, not yet finished. Affairs have taken a new turn, which maybe even Micah did not expect. But God inspires him for the momentary duty and emergency. The cloud of warning having been heeded, the promise now shines in all the glory of the rainbow of hope. Micah stands amid the astonished people of the court and tells them of future blessings on Judah's realm. He goes all around the scene of future joys, and takes four views of it, each presented in its own peculiar way. Zion shall be established; Zion's King shall come; Zion's remnant shall be gathered; Zion's enemies shall be destroyed. In that glowing promise is pointed out the place in which Messiah should be born: "Thou, Bethlehem Ephratah." But before the time shall come these soothsayers must be banished, these witchcrafts must be done away, these images must be cut down, these chariots and horses must be removed. The prophet ceases. His city mission has been crowned with marked success. He retires from Jerusalem to await notice in one more scene.

III.—THE RUSTIC SEER AT HOME AGAIN

"Hear ye now." The third discourse is addressed again to the masses of Judah's yeomanry. He went to the city for a purpose; and when that purpose was

achieved he lost no time in getting back to his favorite sphere among the hills and valleys of his home. The king is right. Now see how the people stand. God is going to settle this matter, and that speedily, and in a most remarkable way. There is to be a discussion of the merits of the question between God and His people. The innumerable hills and mountains of Judah are summoned to hear the controversy. Micah is an outsider, a looker-on, a listener. See the picture. The hills are the audience. God and His people are the speakers. Jehovah begins: "What have I done to thee? How have I wearied thee? Testify against me." The people evade by asking: "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord? and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, and with calves of a year old?" Jehovah: "Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of lambs and ten thousands of rivers of oil?" People: "Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" Jehovah: "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with thy God?"

Have these things been done? Have these moral duties been performed? Then the Lord brings in some witnesses against the people, witnesses they cannot gainsay, witnesses whose testimony utterly confounds them, and strikes them dumb. Whose are these things that are now held up before the people? These things are witnesses. Look on them, hills and

mountains that are to judge between Jehovah and His people. Whose are these? Ill-gotten gains! Scant measures! Bags of deceitful weights! What have God's people to say now? Nothing. They cannot answer those silent witnesses against them. They are dumb. But God speaks. He passes sentence, a fearful sentence. Read it with care and dwell upon it with concern. The hills and the mountains acquiesce in the justice of God's sentence.

The deep silence which ensues upon this great debate between God and man is broken not by a sighing wind, not by any moan of hill or vale. Nature is hushed, is absolutely still. God has spoken. What can any creature say? The silence yields to a peculiar plaintive voice. Micah assents to justice; but pleads for mercy. "O God, feed thy people, in the midst of Carmel in Bashan and in Gilead, as in the days of old." With the wondrous faith that, while the lips move in prayer, holds out the hands to receive the answer, Micah seems lifted up above the anarchy which reigns around him, and transforms his prayer into a triumphal song. He asks the blessing; grasps it by the far-reaching hand of faith; and shouts the note of victory. Hear his grand words. Catch the lingering chimes, whose echoes last, even though the prophet has vanished far from sight. "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity? Thou wilt cast all our sins into the depths of the sea."

Micah has concluded his message. He has spoken his last words. The deep silence that follows no one

would even desire to be broken save only by the recurring echoes of the prophet's final note of divine grace and love. That echo is the cherished blessing of every age. That echo is the richest treasure of to-day.

VII

ISAIAH

"Isaiah the son of Amos."—ISAIAH 1: 1.

ISAIAH the man and Isaiah the book open a boundless field of thought. Years of life might profitably be spent in searching this one mine of precious truth. Certainly a course of studies running through many months could scarcely more than skim the surface of this sea of wealth. What then can one now do? What arrangement can be made that will crowd into an hour this study of Isaiah's illustrious book? So great a prophet, and his life prolonged through so great a number of years! His recorded prophecies constitute the greatest and the grandest of all the prophetic books. There can be no allusion to the analysis of the book, no reference to the outline of its prophetic thought. The prophet himself engages attention as he permits himself to be known through the book which he has written. The present purpose is to trace his life, character, work, and destiny, as illustrated by his pen. Consider

I.—ISAIAH AT HOME

His home was in Jerusalem. He dwelt amid the glare and glitter of the central city of the realm,

amid the imposing splendors of the capital of the nation; the heart of the kingdom where throbbed the nation's life. He is the first of the prophets who is intimately connected with the royal court. Amos and Micah were rural in their tastes and habits and homes. Joel served at Jehovah's altar. Isaiah dwells among the nobles, princes, and kings of the royal city. There is given in his book a glimpse of his domestic circle, an inner view of his city home. As in Hosea's case, so Isaiah's is an eminently prophetic family. There they all are. They are introduced by name or title to all who read Isaiah's book. Isaiah, whose name means "salvation of Jehovah." His wife, whose name is not given, but whose title is the prophetess. The wives of the prophets are not in virtue of this relation called prophetesses. There is here at least the suggestion that Isaiah's wife exercised in some degree and in some way prophetic gifts. None of her prophecies, if she ever spoke or wrote them, have come down to us. The eldest son is Shear-Jashub—"The remnant shall return." A second son is Maher-shalal-hash baz: "Rapid spoiler, speedy prey." This family is perhaps enlarged by two other children. As to their presence in the home there is only an inference. One is Immanuel, the type of the greater Immanuel of a future day. The other is a daughter Hephzibah, who became the wife of King Hezekiah.

If any are curious to know the lineage of Isaiah it can be said that it is claimed for him that royal blood flowed in his veins. His father Amoz was said to be the younger brother of Uzziah. Isaiah was

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grandson of one king, nephew of another, and father-in-law of another, and grandfather of a fourth—by whose decree, it is said, the prophet suffered martyrdom. One thing is quite sure, whatever may be said about his royal blood, he had a royal soul, a royal mind, and he did a royal work. That surely is royalty enough. That is a richer heritage to bequeath than a jeweled crown and a splendid throne.

While looking in upon him at his home we may note his dress. Elijah is always pictured as girt about with skins of wild beasts, the denizens of Gilead's dark ravines. Amos is wrapped with a coarse herdman's garment. Micah, half clothed, moves about among his humble hearers. But Isaiah is always represented as arrayed in princely robes, becoming his noble sphere. This assertion is merely inferential. There is ample reason for it. He was a dweller in Jerusalem, and must dress according to the habits of society. He was a counselor of kings, and must appear in keeping with his exalted office. Yet once more it may be noted that occasionally, when he speaks of coming disasters, he throws off his soft and costly robes and arrays himself in coarse garb the better to picture the sad future to which he would turn the people's thoughts. The implication is that his usual robes were not in keeping with the woes of which he speaks.

Before turning from the domestic circle of Isaiah it may be well to say a word about his style. In the use of his pen he seems to possess a versatile genius. No special style marks his entire book. In it many styles combine. It is prose and poetry. Sometimes

so simple is his language that the false prophets of his day jeered him for the plainness and simplicity of his speech, and bade him speak to babes and not to men. Sometimes his thoughts are expressed in words so sublime and so grand that he attains the loftiest pinnacle of literary excellence, where he calmly reigns with scarcely a peer with whom to share his glories. There is very little apparent art in his writings, far less than in many other inspired authors; far less than in Micah his contemporary. The difference between the two is the difference between the garden the work of human hands where there is much beauty and much order, and the primeval forest planted by God's almighty hand: where there are no straight walks, no rounded beds, no shaded avenues, but where there is unmeasured beauty beneath and unrestricted grandeur overhead. Not many symbols, if any, are found in Isaiah. There is but one vision recorded in his book. But there are signs almost innumerable, signs that pledge the truths which his glowing words proclaim. The power of his style is seen in this, that it is always suited to the subject in hand. Hence he can soar with the eagle and alight on the dizzy crags, or he can nestle with the lark and be at home in the thicket of humble briers and thorns. In this sense of remarkable adaptability he was all things to all men that he might save some.

II.—ISAIAH'S CALL TO THE PROPHETIC WORK

His was a truly royal call to the great prophetic office. The only vision which Isaiah seems to have

had was the one in which he recognized God's voice summoning him to his great lifework. It was in the year that King Uzziah died—a year famous in the annals of the world. He who is versed in history cannot have failed to note that there are periods in which greatness seems to have left the world, when the average of human power is low, when eminence is scarcely seen. Again there are periods when heroes appear not singly, but in clusters, like bright constellations in the skies; periods when great men are multiplied. These are the periods which break into the monotony of history and form the epochs by which history is traced. These are the landmarks in the progress of the world.

The year in which Uzziah died, and in which Isaiah is called to his prophetic work, is one of the most illustrious eras in the annals of the world. Not to speak of Judah, its monarch, and its famous prophet —Babylon, Greece, and Rome make out the reckoning of their ages from that famous date. The era of Nabonassar begins there. The Olympiads of Greece begin their reckoning there. The foundation of Rome, the *annus urbis conditae*, is laid as Isaiah begins his sacred services, his prophetc song. It would be difficult to name any other period into which are clustered so many renowned events than that in which the heavenly vision broke on Isaiah's eyes.

The leprous King Uzziah is dying in his separate house. Long since dead to the nation by reason of his terrible disease, banished from his royal palace, and buried alive in the leper house, he is wasting

away and is rapidly nearing the grave. A young man of noble bearing and elastic step walking in Jerusalem turns toward the Temple, enters the gate, mounts the stairway of Jehovah's house. He is guided by an unseen and unfelt hand, that is leading him on to his great lifework in the path of honor and renown. He knows it not. But unconscious of the Presence, he is led. The day shall decide his destiny and mark his entrance on a most remarkable career. It is young Isaiah. The aged king is dropping into his waiting grave. Youthful Isaiah is just entering, divinely led, upon his most illustrious career.

Follow the young man. He is in the Temple court. He advances, until he comes squarely in front of the Holy Place. There he stands between Jachin and Boaz, pillars of the porch. He gazes intently in the direction of the Holy Place, as if he were looking through the cedar door, and through the inner veil into the Sanctuary itself where the glory of the Lord is enthroned upon the mercy seat. While he gazes the cedar door moves, swinging on its hinges, and he sees into the Holy Place. Then beyond it the richly embroidered curtain that hangs before the holiest of all is, by unseen hands, drawn aside. Isaiah gazes into the most sacred place.

He sees Jehovah enthroned in His glory. The skirts of His royal robes fill the Temple. Around are heavenly guards called seraphim, that send back and forth from side to side the song, "Holy! Holy! Holy! is the Lord of hosts! The whole earth is full of His glory!" The Temple rocks with the thunder of their voices, and the building is filled with smoke.

Shall not the youthful Isaiah tremble at the awful scene that floods his vision? He speaks. Hear him. He mutters to himself. Poor youth, he is overwhelmed with fear. Catch his groan as it clothes itself in the language of despair. "Woe is me! For I am undone! Mine eyes have seen the King the Lord of Hosts." Who can help him? None will dare.

See! A flaming seraph, that had sung with folded wings, stills his song and spreads his bright wings, catches a burning coal from off the altar, alights at Isaiah's side, and touches the young man's lips, and then with heavenly voice speaks these words: "Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin is purged." Then for the first time in the vision Jehovah's voice is heard: "Whom shall I send? and who will go for us?" Who responds? Young Isaiah, who just now trembled as if he would die of fright and of remorse, speaks out boldly. His lips no longer mutter. They are touched with a flaming coal from God's altar. He answers, "Here am I, send me."

The words that follow in the vision, five short verses which constitute Isaiah's commission, give us a full and far-reaching view of Isaiah's long ministry, and open a vista extending through the entire book. One would suppose that a ministry thus commissioned and announced and inaugurated would be attended by an extraordinary success. Jehovah says: "Go. But the people will not heed." Isaiah cries: "Lord, how long?" Jehovah: "Until the land is wasted, and the people are removed away; but a remnant shall return." Then Jehovah gives a sign

to Isaiah of the truth He spoke. An aged teil or oak is shattered, cut down to the roots, and out of the stump a new shoot puts up and becomes a mighty, vigorous tree. The nation is cut down. It will lie very low. But there shall be a remnant blessed, and there shall be a Branch that shall shoot forth from the withered stem of Jesse. Hence Isaiah named his first son "Remnant shall return."

III.—ISAIAH'S FIRST PROPHETIC MESSAGE

Isaiah's prophetic message which in his book follows this splendid vision may be called in the language of to-day the prophet's first sermon after his heavenly ordination. Years had rolled by since he had seen the vision and heard the celestial voice. Uzziah had died and been buried. Jotham had reigned in his stead, and died. Now Ahaz is on the throne. It is not known whether Isaiah was silent in that interval. He has left no record of anything spoken in Jotham's reign. Ahaz is on the throne. He is a weak and wicked king. He has cut loose from Jehovah, and has no genius of his own to carve out his royal fortune. The vulture scents the carcass, and circles down upon it. Surrounding nations detect the double weakness of Judah's king; and armies swarm about his borders. Israel and Syria combine their forces to overthrow Jerusalem. The war-cloud gathers. Its thunders roll in the distance over the hills. The prize for which these allied armies march and marshal is David's throne, now disgraced by weak and wicked Ahaz. Great successes attend

the allied forces on the borders of the kingdom. Judah's realm seems doomed. The tidings reach Jerusalem. The king and his people tremble like the forest leaves in the hurricane. The king and his princes muster courage enough to go around the city walls and search the weak points, and fortify them, ere the enemy rattles at the gate. So the king rides out, and his guard. They go to the north wall to examine the waterworks, the conduit of the upper pool.

God says to Isaiah, "Go meet the king, thou and thy son Shear-jashub." Isaiah stands before Ahaz. The king trembles. Jehovah's servant is very bold. Though the political skies look very dark, Isaiah tells the trembling king that Jerusalem is safe from these combined armies. Be not afraid of Israel! In sixty-five years Israel shall be broken; and Judah shall yet stand. Does King Ahaz wish a sign? Let him ask it in heaven or earth! No? Wicked men fear signs. They sometimes credit their piety with a refusal to ask a sign, not wishing to tempt the Lord. The sign shall be given. The prophetic child "Immanuel" shall not pass the bounds of infancy before these lands, whose armies are so greatly feared, shall be desolate. But what will stop the allied armies? Prophecy does not turn the point of a spear or the edge of a sword. No; but the God of prophecy does. Isaiah says that God will hiss for the fly of Egypt and for the bee of Assyria. The buzz of the Assyrian bees is heard. Israel and Syria raise their siege and hasten home to attend to their own affairs. In

sixty-five years Israel is led away captive to Assyrian land. Judah's kingdom still stood in strength.

IV.—ISAIAH THE ROYAL COUNSELOR

Various circumstances combine to elevate Isaiah to eminent rank and influence. In some respects he is a child of fortune, like Sophocles, the great dramatist on whom extraordinary gifts and blessings were bestowed. His princely lineage, his native talent, his splendid call, his successful prophecy just narrated, all opened the way for his advance and helped him forward to higher reach and broader sphere. Last and not least, just as his fame began to spread abroad a king ascended the throne who of all others was best fitted to appreciate Isaiah's worth. Hezekiah now sits on David's throne. He has been converted by the homely ministry of Micah. He finds in Isaiah just the counselor he needs. It was Isaiah's fortune in his prime to be the companion and adviser of a king who has been pronounced the greatest, the best, the wisest king that sat on Judah's throne. So intimately connected are the king and his adviser that it is difficult to say which contributed most to shape the nation's destiny, the great king or his great counselor. Of this let each judge for himself.

Rumors of trouble in the distant East had called the besiegers once before from the gates of Jerusalem to defend their own land from a threatening foe. Now again the eastern armies swarm around Jerusalem. The Assyrian armies enter the land from the north. Like Hannibal's historic passage of the

Alps, the armies of the East wend their way through the narrow defiles of Lebanon, cross the rivers that course about its base, pass through its wild romantic gorges, and steadily advance toward Jerusalem. Each fortress of the heights of Benjamin succumbs to the proud foe. Then the invading army sweeps around Jerusalem and plants the Assyrian standard in every vale and on every hill crest around the city. Jerusalem alone is left. Within it the people have gathered. The gates are shut, locked, and barricaded. Look over its walls! On every side Assyrian hosts are seen. Their chariots rumble over the hills. Their spears glisten in the sunlight. It seems as if the hour has come, the hour of Judah's defeat and ruin.

Up to this point the king had kept a brave heart, but even he now gives way. By his command the gold is torn from the Temple, and the brass from the pillars. Peace is bought with the treasures of God's house. As the threatening armies turn away and file down the valley under the city walls, there is great rejoicing among the people on the walls. But in the glad song one plaintive voice is heard. Isaiah groans: "Look away from me. I will weep bitterly. Labor not to comfort me."

No sooner were the Assyrians out of sight than the king found his heart grow bold again. He fortified himself, and again took counsel of Isaiah. His defiant air brought the Assyrians back. They camp without the wall. An embassy knocks at the city gate. Three Assyrians desire a conference. The king sends three men of Judah to confer just out-

side the city gate. The people crowd upon the walls to see and hear. The Assyrian, speaking for his king, offers great rewards to all who will surrender. He makes the offer in Hebrew. The men of Judah beg him not to speak in Hebrew, lest the people hear and understand and mutiny. But in louder voice he speaks to the people on the wall. The gate opens and the three men of Judah enter the city, and appear before the king, and lay the result of their conference before him.

Hark! A messenger from the Assyrian camp. A letter direct from Sennacherib to Judah's king: "The fate of Lachish awaits Jerusalem." The king, it seems, takes the letter into the Holy of Holies, and lays it before Jehovah, between the Cherubim on the mercy seat. He waits, but no answer comes from the sacred shrine. All is still as death behind the richly broidered veil. The answer comes from without the Temple. It falls from Isaiah's lips.

Now all through the trying scenes Isaiah had been confident. A sweet assurance swayed his heart, that rested not on gold or brass or human help, but on the word of God. He remembered the shattered oak, from whose withered stump a new green shoot had sprung. A remnant shall return. Hear now his prophecy. Though the city was besieged by overwhelming numbers; though utterly discouraged were the king and all his other counselors; though ruin seemed inevitable, Isaiah's heart is calm and his words are full of cheer. The king and his princes tremble with overpowering fear. Before them stands Isaiah, calm, hopeful, and assured: "He shall not come into

the city nor shoot an arrow there. Nor come before it with shields. Nor cast a bank against it."

There can be no misapprehending such words as these. No doubtful oracular response is this. Isaiah rests his reputation as a prophet on these few words. If an arrow fly from Assyrian bow and light within Jerusalem Isaiah is no prophet. So unlikely the prophecy to be fulfilled that hardly did it send a ray of hope into the darkened hearts of king and people. The day wore its hours away. The sun departing painted the skies with gorgeous hues. Night wrapped the land in darkness. A deeper darkness brooded over the people of Jerusalem, the darkness of despair. The early dawn appears fringing the mountain tops. Isaiah waits in confidence. The morning breezes from the sea blow softly over Jerusalem. A strange silence encompasses the city walls. The Assyrians are gone! Not one of the great multitude is left. The angel of Jehovah smote them. They are gone. They are gone never to return. For great Assyria soon met its doom and bowed to a superior power. Jerusalem is free! Judah is safe! Isaiah is a great counselor and true prophet of the Lord!

V.—ISAIAH THE KING'S PHYSICIAN

The anxiety of the siege, the cares of the kingdom, and the excitement of the deliverance culminated in the king's serious illness. He lies on a bed of alarming sickness. He is getting worse day by day. He is nearing the borders of the grave. Isaiah goes to see him as his personal friend and royal

counselor. As he speaks no flattering words in health, so now in sickness his words are faithful and severe. He stands by his king's side and says: "Thou shalt die, and not live." This to Hezekiah was like a thunderbolt from a clear sky. Hezekiah and the people had begun to think that Hezekiah was immortal. They had appropriated to him the glorious promises of a Messiah whose kingdom should endure forever. Hezekiah was not married. He had no heir to the throne. He was not looking forward to an hour of death. Hence he is overwhelmed to find himself on the borders of the grave. He turns his face to the wall, and weeps out his sadness in prayer to God for life.

That prayer is heard. A brighter vision graciously is granted to Isaiah. The prophet makes a poultice of figs. With it instantly he heals the king. Hezekiah asks a sign. A sign is given. The shadow goes back ten degrees on the sun dial of Ahaz, that was still standing in the palace court. Fifteen years are added to his life. In three days he worships in the Temple. The shadow is lifted. The bright light reappears. A sorrowing people are filled again with joy. Gladness reigns throughout the land.

VI.—ISAIAH THE KING'S REPROVER

The tidings of the king's deliverance from the Assyrians and from death reached distant Babylon, then just looming up in the inception of its grandeur. Its king was the rival of the Assyrian king. An embassy arrives at Jerusalem. It is robed in bril-

liancy itself. Who are they? Whence came they? These are questions whispered all around. From Babylon they come. First now the name of this great city falls on Judah's ear. Oh, that it had been the last! The brilliant embassy is handsomely received, is liberally feasted, and is generously shown around. None of the king's glory is hidden from their eager eyes. His wealth is all proudly paraded before the Oriental embassy. The Babylonian ambassadors depart, pleased with their reception, and carry to their king the tidings of the mine of wealth they have discovered.

A rap is heard at Hezekiah's door. Who is it? Isaiah the wise counselor, the faithful friend, the stern reprover of every wrong: "The days come that all that is in thine house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store, shall be carried to Babylon."

VII.—ISAIAH THE MARTYR

The fifteen years graciously added to the royal life have passed, and Hezekiah dies. A boy twelve years of age ascends the throne. Manasseh is his name; the son of Hephzibah. There is good reason to believe that Hephzibah, Hezekiah's beloved wife, was Isaiah's daughter. If this supposition is correct, the young king is grandson of Isaiah. A wicked prince whose crimes ripen as he grows, he becomes the vilest of Judah's kings. He is the persecutor of the Church of God. Day by day good men are ordered to execution by the king. The blood of the faithful freely flows.

An aged prophet dwells in Jerusalem. Nearly a hundred years mark his eventful life. The lines of many days are deeply traced upon his noble brow. He is bowed with the infirmities of age. He has a claim on the young king's affection and on his care. By the king's command rough soldiers, enlisted under a banner which Isaiah had often saved from the ignominy of defeat, pursue the old man. He speeds as best he can and hides himself in the hollow of an old and shattered tree, hoping that there he might find a refuge where to die in peace. He is easily overtaken, quickly found, and sawn asunder. The bright light went out in darkness. The sweet minstrelsy of song was hushed. The glorious numbers ceased their majestic flow. The faithful lips were sealed. The heart that had long throbbed for Judah's honor ceased to beat. When Isaiah, Judah's grandest bard, prophet, statesman, counselor, poet, physician, friend, lay cold in death's embrace, a martyr to the cause of truth, the bulwark of the nation was torn away. The breakwater had long arrested the fury of the swelling sea. Now that it is gone, the angry billows, mightier by long restraint, with resistless power break over the devoted land.

Like Cicero, the brightest light of Rome, fleeing, overtaken, slain on the shore of his native Italy by the hands of those whose lives had been rescued by his surpassing eloquence, Isaiah the brightest light that shone over all the land, the richest jewel of the kingdom, the brilliant prophet, the consecrated man of God, falls by the decree of him who to the prophet owed his life, his kingdom, and his crown.

VIII

ZEPHANIAH

"Zephaniah the son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah, the son of Amariah, the son of Hizkiah."—ZEPHANIAH 1: 1.

THE book of Zephaniah is one of the unfamiliar books of the Bible. It is little read by general Bible readers. As an evidence of this let each one ask himself what he knows about the man that bears this name and about his book. The reason for this general neglect of Zephaniah deserves a notice. Why is it that he is so little read? Why is it that while every Bible reader has his favorite prophet, no one is likely to claim Zephaniah as his favorite? It is probably because there is less individuality in this book than in any other. There is less that boldly marks Zephaniah and makes him different from everybody else. There is nothing in this book that stands out in very bold relief. There is no special thought or image or figure that at once becomes linked with Zephaniah's name, and after we have read the book calls back with vividness the prophet and his message. That is what is meant by the lack of strong individuality. With many of the prophets it is true that the bare mention of the prophet's name at once suggests a beautiful thought, a charming picture, a bright

vision, and exquisite statement, an interesting incident, forever linked with the prophet's name. The book is often read to renew the pleasure. There is nothing of this kind in Zephaniah's book.

While this accounts for the general neglect of Zephaniah's book, it should not be allowed to disparage the excellence of this book of prophecy. Among the shortest and least prominent books of the Bible, it affords to the earnest student much of interest. The astronomer does not reserve his searching glass for stars only of the first magnitude, else many a beautiful world would be banished from the field of his vision. There are several facts about Zephaniah, among the very sparse incidents of his recorded life, each of which sheds some light upon his book. In the arrangement of our thoughts for this study let us take up these facts singly, and with each as an illuminating light seek to trace and to illustrate Zephaniah's thoughts.

I.—ZEPHANIAH AS A MAN

He introduces himself to us by his genealogy. He hangs his family portraits before us that we may see who his ancestors were. He gives us quite a long list of his ancestors. Something this is that is very remarkable for a prophet. Something this is that these prophets seem to have avoided with design. We have observed all along how these holy men have studiously avoided obtruding themselves through the agency of their messages. They have always concealed the messenger behind the message. They have

accounted the servant less important than the service which he rendered. Three of the prophets barely mention their own names. Then forthwith they proceed to deliver their prophecies. Others add their fathers' names; not after all that the world might know who their fathers were; but to prevent a confusion of the prophet with some other person having the same name. Joel? Which of the many Joels? The son of Pethuel. Some mention their employment, as Amos the herdman of Tekoa. Others again link their names with their homes. Which Micah? The Morasthite. Which Nahum? The Elkoshite. All this is modest enough and is clothed with charming humility. In it there is no violation of the rigid prophetic rule—a published message and a hidden self.

Now see how Zephaniah introduces himself. His is no common name. There would be no likelihood of confounding him with anybody else. He might have just said Zephaniah, and gone on with his prophecy. But he pauses to announce his father's name. Well, that is not very strange. Other prophets have done as much. When, however, he has once launched into the genealogical sea he sails right on. His grandfather's name. His great grandfather's name. His great, great grandfather's name! This is altogether exceptional, and puts us on the line of inquiry for the reason of such a marked deviation from the way of all the other seers.

Now there are two questions about this singular fact. Why did Zephaniah give us his genealogy at all? When once he began to give it, why did he not

keep on until he reached Abraham, the father of all the Hebrews? Both these questions can be answered at one time. The prophet was evidently aiming at his great, great grandfather Hizkiah. His design is evident to make a link that shall bind his own name to his distant sire's. And who is Hizkiah, whose memory is thus unearthed to grace a prophet's name? It will occur to the Bible student that over one hundred years before Zephaniah's day Hezekiah sat on David's throne. He was the greatest, best, and wisest of all Judah's kings. May not Hizkiah and Hezekiah be the same? Zephaniah, in Jewish lore, was always said to be the great grandson of Judah's noble king. If it had been family pride that caused the prophet to remind the world of his high origin, he might claim indulgence for such pride. Any man might be proud who could claim descent from such a king. Men often boast of blood not half so good as that which coursed through Zephaniah's veins. But with Zephaniah it was no idle boast. Far from it. Such were the times in which he lived, his noble origin gave him a power and an influence with which to begin his prophetic work. With the vantage of his exalted rank and high lineage he was lifted to an eminence and placed on a pinnacle. His prophetic trumpet note could be better heard as it floated over all the land.

II.—ZEPHANIAH AS THE FIRST PROPHET AFTER A PROLONGED SEASON OF NO VISION

His voice broke a protracted silence in the prophetic world. There was a long period in Judah in

which there was no revelation of God, no vision of the future, no prophetic guide. The nation wandered in darkness, groped in the deep shadows of night. Zephaniah was the morning star that heralded the dawning of a new day. He interrupted the long protracted silence wherein God's voice was not heard. That interval of unrelieved darkness serves as a shadowed background on which the better to picture Zephaniah's life and work.

Through all the prophetic period by us thus far considered, when once the light of prophecy had been kindled it never completely died away. From Jonah to Isaiah there had all along been at least one prophet living and testifying to the truth. Sometimes there had been two. Occasionally even three. It was so arranged that ere one prophet passed off the scene another entered; ere one voice was hushed another was heard. There was always thus a living witness for Jehovah in one at least of these holy, consecrated, fearless men. For two hundred years the lamp burned brightly. It rather increased its brilliance and its glow. For Nahum, Micah, and Isaiah were contemporaneous for many years, and shed their combined light of prophecy on the world. How often the candle flares up with unusual brilliance ere it goes out in utter darkness! Then in the brightness and glow of these three great prophets there may well be a fear lest the night be near at hand.

Do you remember that Micah said, when he addressed the princes of the land, that because the false prophets had deceived the people they should them-

selves be deceived, and that there would come a night of deep darkness when there would be no vision? The time was nearer than many thought. Nahum, Micah, and Isaiah all died in one year. With their expiring breath the lamp of prophecy which had uninterruptedly burned for two hundred years went out in the shadow of dreadful night. This was the period of Manasseh's reign; the worst, the longest, and the darkest reign recorded in the annals of Judah's realm. In the main, sin reigned unchecked; crime knew no restraint. Revels by night were subject to no intrusion. A sea of wickedness flooded the whole land. There was not one breakwater to stay the fierce advance. Isaiah was dead; Micah was dead; Nahum was dead. No prophet had yet arisen to speak for truth and holiness. It was a long, dark night! When will the morning come and the shadows flee away? When will God's awful silence cease and His voice, even though in tones of judgment, awake the stillness of the land? When will God arouse his slumbering people? God seemed to have forsaken the land; seemed to have turned away in anger. People began to think so. Zephaniah, in reviewing that awful night, says there were those who say in their heart and even in their words, "The Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil." He is indifferent to his once loved Judah. This cessation of prophecy continued through Manasseh's reign and through Amon's reign. In this awful silence of Jehovah the young Josiah ascended the throne. As the crown rests upon his youthful brow the bright prophetic light, long absent, long desired, gleams

forth upon the land once more. A prophet of Jehovah speaks. It is Zephaniah. No wonder now he bridges the wretched chasm and makes sure his relationship to Judah's noblest, best, and wisest king.

Three features of this book seem to be the outgrowth of this fact; this fact that Zephaniah stood on the line between the long, dark night of sin and the dawning of a brief, but brighter day.

1. His Style Has the Impress of His Time.— Those days of Manasseh and Amon, crimsoned with righteous blood and darkened by cruel tyranny, were just the days to repress boldness and drain the soul of all its daring qualities. Men spoke in whispers, lest the breeze should waft their words to royal ears, and seal their death. They were not the times to create heroes. Such were the days in which Zephaniah was born and reared. Remarkable it was that, being of princely lineage, if there was in him any piety at all, he escaped the fire and the steel. Perhaps it was owing to the prudence and the cautious gentleness which are features of his book. His style admirably comports with such a training. Joel was elegant; Amos abrupt; Micah strong; Nahum vivid. Isaiah possessed all these qualities in a pre-eminent degree. In him we find Joel, Amos, Micah, Nahum magnified. Zephaniah, who has no special style peculiar to himself, possesses all these qualities, but in an inferior degree. In him we find the qualities of Joel, Amos, Micah, Nahum; but minified. He is the miniature of all the rest. In him there is something of elegance, something of grandeur, something of vividness; but he is never referred to as the model

of either style. His proportions therefore may not be large. He may not loom up as even one of the grandest prophets. But we can scarcely exaggerate the sensation which his appearance must have produced in the land. When the ship has been long at sea, rocked by the waves and driven by the winds, and now at last it nears the long-desired coast, the watchman eagerly scans the wide expanse to catch a glimpse of the friendly light by which to direct the vessel's course in safety to the port. The light may be dim, and it may send out but a flickering ray; but because it is the first light that breaks in on the darkness, its value is enhanced. Fifty years of silence and of darkness! Now a light, though not exceeding large, nor very bright, yet very welcome, is kindled in the soul of Zephaniah. Its soft and gentle light, as the gray morning dawn, awakens a nation.

2. His Theme Has the Impress of His Time.— He comes at the close of a time of unusual degradation, idolatry, and crime. What do you suppose will be the subject of his message? What sort of a song will Zephaniah sing? Of course his word must be the word of reproof; reproof for idolatry and crimes. People's creed: "God is indifferent." Hear his reproof: "Her princes are roaring lions; her judges are evening wolves; her prophets are treacherous persons; her priests have broken the law and polluted the sanctuary."

3. Another circumstance hinted at, rather than definitely mentioned, the outgrowth of Zephaniah's position, is worthy of notice here. The great refor-

mation which Josiah began received perhaps its earliest impulses from Zephaniah's prophetic words. He was, it would seem, the morning star of that reforming day. All honor, then, to this noble servant of Jehovah, born in Judah's darkest days, in his heart first kindled the heavenly light that soon spread over and blessed the entire kingdom.

III.—ZEPHANIAH AS THE LAST PROPHET WHOSE ENTIRE LIFE PRECEDES JUDAH'S CAPTIVITY

He is the prophet whose life comes nearest to the Fall of Jerusalem, yet who is spared the sight of that terrible calamity. Isaiah died seventy years before Jerusalem fell. Zephaniah died about five years before that event. His prophetic life just spanned the little day of grace between the darkness of idolatry and the darkness of exile. The beginning of his work we may call the daydawn; its end, the evening twilight, that quickly merges into the night of unutterable woe. We have viewed him as ushering in the day by reproofs for the deeds of darkness that had marked the night of sin; we have seen him look back over the chasm and describe its terrible abyss. We now view him as in the evening of this day, looking forward to a near future of judgment on the guilty nation. Standing as the last of these heavenly heralds, and of them all the nearest to the terrible event which they all predict, no wonder he speaks with clearness of coming doom. Zephaniah has been called the prophet of Judgment. Judgment is his peculiar and prevailing mission. His

words burn with righteous wrath. We are all familiar with the hymn, "Dies irae, dies illa"—"The day of wrath, that dreadful day." Perhaps all do not know these verses are a rendition of Zephaniah's words. The prophetic horizon is so full of smoke and fire and death, and terrors and judgment, Zephaniah, as he gazes on it, can see scarcely anything else, and can scarcely speak of anything else. His judgments take two lines of thought.

1. On Judah.—Comparing history with history, and prophecy with prophecy, it may be observed that the judgment which Zephaniah pronounces on Judah was threefold. It culminated, through two previous stages, in its climax.

First, the invasion of the Scythians, the northern prolific hordes that ever and anon bursting their barriers come in multitudinous masses upon the sunnier climes. Clad in their furs, and fierce as the beasts whose hides they wear, they swoop down upon the ancient monarchies of the South. They penetrate as far as Egypt, and then turn back home, ravaging as they go and come. They leave a lasting memento of their presence in the name of a town in the plain of Esdraelon—Scythopolis, old Bethshan. Zephaniah saw them as they prowled around: "The sea coast shall be dwellings and cottages for shepherds, and folds for flocks." This occurred in Josiah's day.

Second, a subordination to Egypt. Judah lay between Assyria and Egypt, and seemed never to know which way to lean. Whichever way the kingdom leaned seemed always to be the wrong way. Hezekiah

allied himself with Egypt against Assyria, and suffered for it. Josiah allied himself with Assyria against Egypt, was slain, and his kingdom was brought under Egyptian rule.

Third, these were preliminary to the third, the greatest calamity, that befell Judah. Hear the solemn words: "I will utterly consume all things from off the land, saith the Lord. I will consume man and beast. I will consume the fowls of the heavens and the fishes of the sea, and the idols of the wicked. And will cut off man from off the land. I will stretch out mine hand against Judah, and upon all the inhabitants of the land." Many of the people might be supposed to say, that they had heard such words before, but still the kingdom stood. Zephaniah, however, says: "The day of the Lord is at hand: He hath prepared a sacrifice; He hath bidden his guests." When so much as that is done, the feast is not far away. The day is very near: "That day of wrath, that dreadful day." Already Babylon is marshaling her forces, and equipping her armies, and giving her orders, and mapping out her plans, and turning the eye of conquest on Jerusalem. The day is at hand. But the people believed it not.

2. On Surrounding Nations, Especially the Philistine Cities.—The prophet turns his thunderbolt toward Philistia, and fulminates against its cities. Several things are here worthy of notice.

First, he mentions only four cities. There were five cities of Philistia, always connected in historic mention. Which one is omitted? Gath. Why is it omitted? It had either been previously destroyed or

had come under the protectorate of Judah, and was included under Judah's judgment. Now note the judgments of these four cities. "Gaza shall be forsaken (desert); Ashkelon a desolation; they shall drive out Ashdod at noonday; and Ekron shall be rooted up." "Gaza shall be desert." Ages roll on and the fair city of Philistia sits like a queen in beauty on the coast. But God's hand is mighty, and will prevail. In after days an evangelist is in Samaria. The Spirit communicates a heavenly command: "Arise, go toward the south, unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem to Gaza, which is desert." If it be insisted that it was the way, and not Gaza, which is desert, hear what an unbelieving eye-witness of Gaza some years ago said: "Ruins of white marble sometimes found at Gaza prove that it was once the abode of luxury and opulence. It has shared the general ruin and is now a defenseless village." It seems to have fulfilled its curse. It is a silent witness to the truth of the prophet's word. If from its ruins it should rise again, still it fell as low as the prophet said. "Ashkelon a desolation." The lofty towers of once royal Ashkelon lie scattered on the ground, and the ruins within its walls do not shelter a human being. "They shall drive out Ashdod at noonday." Ashdod was noted for its strong fortifications. Ashdod has the eminence of having withstood the longest siege on record—twenty-nine years. Yet note the prophecy—"shall be driven out." To-day it is nothing. "Ekron shall be rooted up." Gaza still subsists. Ashkelon and Ashdod preserve their names in their ruins. Ekron is rooted up. The

very traces of the royal city are removed; and no one knows where it once proudly stood. Surely "prophecy and providence are guided by the same unerring hand." The prophet who stood on the eve of such great and calamitous events, even though he be not grandest of all the seers, held a light whose fadeless rays, undimmed, have reached this distant age.

IV.—ZEPHANIAH AS A LONELY PROPHET

It is true that during Zephaniah's last years Jeremiah and Habakkuk enter the scene and share the work with him. The ebbing years of his life were blessed with some prophetic association. His age was their youth. But the greater part of his life, and that the earlier, when buoyant nature yearns for association, Zephaniah stood alone, the solitary prophet of the day. In this he resembles Hosea, a large part of whose life was without an associate prophet. In this respect these two seers are unlike all the others. It seems a peculiarly interesting fact that in the heart of the kingdom burns one lamp, the glow of whose light radiates throughout a realm; in one heart a heavenly fire, whose warmth shall be felt throughout the land. How well, then, is our prophet named—Zephaniah: "Watchman of Jehovah." He mounts his watchtower. He faithfully scans the horizon all around. He looks back on the dark abyss of sin which just preceded his prophetic work. He bridges the yawning gulf and sees Hezekiah's glorious day preceding that, and links his name to the noble kinsman king. The watchman looks forward upon

the dark scene of exile and captivity. He speaks of judgment. But he bridges that too, and looks beyond, beyond all the darkness and all the night. Ascending to the very pinnacle of his watchtower, lifting himself up to his greatest height, he gazes onward—far away through the long vista and exclaims: "Sing, O daughter of Zion; Shout, O Israel. Be glad and rejoice with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem. The Lord hath taken away thy judgment. He hath cast out thine enemy. The King of Israel, even the Lord, is in the midst of thee. Thou shalt not see evil any more." "I will make you a name and a praise among all people of the earth."

The watchman of Jehovah has delivered Heaven's judgment and Heaven's promise. He has revealed the shadow and the sunshine. He has given visions of the night and of the day. He comes down from his watchtower, and is gathered to his fathers, and as he sleeps the quiet sleep of peaceful death the skies are overshadowed by the clouds of coming doom; the muttering thunders roll over the hills, the rumbling of eastern chariots is heard, and the Babylonian armies gather around Jerusalem.

IX

HABAKKUK

"Habakkuk."—HABAKKUK 1: 1.

THE brief book of Habakkuk consists of three chapters. Each chapter represents Habakkuk in a new attitude. Through their agency we obtain three glimpses of the prophet. In each glimpse we find him in a peculiar frame of mind. We have, therefore, three pictures of prophetic life, on which we are invited to look in this study.

I.—HABAKKUK AT THE MERCY SEAT: THE PRAYING PROPHET

The curtain rises. Without prelude or preface we find ourselves gazing upon the prophet at prayer. He is prostrate at the Throne of Grace. He is pleading at the Mercy Seat. He is overwhelmed with trouble; and he has carried all his perplexities to Jehovah for divine solution. While the prophet is at prayer, we as observers may indulge in some reflections naturally suggested by the picture.

1. Habakkuk, this praying prophet, is one of the four prophets who mention least about themselves. The other three are Obadiah, Haggai, and Malachi. He mentions neither his parentage, nor his residence,

nor his times. He gives us no clue to his lineage; hints not at the place of his birth; makes no allusion to the reigning king. Abruptly he gives his name. Forthwith he plunges into his prophetic work. The less a prophet says about himself the more eager we often are to learn the particulars of his life. The curiosity which Habakkuk fails to gratify may not, however, be so easily rebuffed, nor be so summarily dismissed. Rabbinical ingenuity here finds an inviting field, and eagerly proceeds to work it up. It finds in Jewish history two nameless men with whom, by this rabbi or by that, Habakkuk is identified. One Jewish writer tells us that, as Jonah was the son of the widow of Zarephath, who was raised to life by Elijah, so Habakkuk was the Shunammite's son whom Elisha raised to life. If the reason for such a theory be asked, this is its slender basis: the Shunammite was told that she should "embrace" her son, and Habakkuk means "embracing." Another Jewish writer tells us that Habakkuk was the sentinel whom Isaiah set to watch for the fall of Babylon. The ground for this opinion: Isaiah did set such a watch, and Habakkuk does predict such a fall. From such improbable and fanciful views we turn to the prophet himself. All that he tells us is: "The burden which Habakkuk the prophet did see."

2. This praying prophet has a very peculiar name. Habakkuk! Hebrew biography is rich in euphonious names. To say nothing of the meaning of those names, their sounds often are like sweetest music. The names of some of these prophetic bards are as soft and pleasant as the notes which float

from their harpstrings. The names of some of Israel's poet-shepherds are like echoes to the gurgling of the waterbrooks, or to the tingle of the fountain-drop as it falls with gentle music into the rippled pool. The Hebrew language is rich in the melody of its names. But we cannot say much for the melody of Habakkuk! A harsher, more uncouth, rougher name cannot easily be found. There never was but one Habakkuk. The example set by giving such a name was never followed. No wonder he needed not to mention his father's name. His own name is eminence enough. There is none in sacred story with whom he may be confounded. It is not at all unlikely that the harshness of this prophet's name has proved a serious barrier to the popularity of his book. If his name had been euphonious, like David, or pleasing, like Isaiah, or mellifluent, like Daniel, many would have been allured to his melodious words, who now must admit they have scarcely ever read them, and who have always thought that Habakkuk's words must be as harsh as his name.

This name has not only by a common, silent consent been banished from domestic circles, but it has been reserved in works of romance to designate whatever character is most ludicrous and laughable. We must write it down as one of the providential mysteries, that so sweet a singer, so grand a prophet, so rapt a poet, so devout a man, should carry such a burden in his name. It is well, however, to note in passing that on his discordant name he has conferred immortal honor. Those who come to know the man will come to impute the music of his song to

his rugged name. There is many a name whose sweetest charm is the reflection of the life it represents.

3. This praying prophet is one of the two prophets in the midst of whose prophetic work Jerusalem fell. This fixes the date of his life and ministry. While he does not give us his date, it may be inferred from his book. The fall of Jerusalem is one of the great events of Israel's history; one of the landmarks in the survey of the ages. Nearly all the prophets pointed to it. It was the dark cloud that formed the background of all their visions. The vividness of their visions was always in proportion to their nearness to the dreadful tragedy. Zephaniah was the last prophet whose ministry was closed ere the cloud burst and vented its fury on the land. Habakkuk and Jeremiah were the two prophets whose sad mission it was to live amid those appalling scenes. These two were the only prophets whose ministries spanned that terrible catastrophe, and were partly in the years of the declining kingdom and partly in the years of exile. Yet neither went into exile to Babylon. Habakkuk, when he saw the dreadful day draw near, and beheld the signal that heralded the approaching Babylonian armies, withdrew from the doomed city, and remained away during the dreadful siege. After the Chaldeans had completed their conquest and had left, he came back to his own country, lived amid its ruins, and died at his farm two years before the exiled people came back to Jerusalem. The scene of the praying prophet occurs just before the fall of Jerusalem.

4. The praying prophet lays down a burden at the Mercy Seat. What brought him to the Mercy Seat? No doubt he often prayed. But what is the special burden which he now seeks to roll off, and which has caused this prayer to be pictured for all the ages? There is a riddle which he cannot solve, a profound mystery whose meshes he cannot unravel. It is not like Samson's riddle, designed for human answer. There is nothing amusing or trivial in it. It is one of the darkest problems that human thought ever grappled. Overwhelmed by it, unable to solve it, Habakkuk goes to Jehovah for the true solution. The prophet holds a colloquy with God. No other voice intrudes upon the exalted conversation. It is either God speaking to Habakkuk, or Habakkuk speaking to God, all through the scene. The prophet seeks his closet, his oratory, his place of prayer. He falls at the footstool of the King, and as the curtain rises for our view the prophet suppliant begins.

(*a*) He complains that everything is out of gear in Judah. Everything is going wrong. Divine providence seems a failure. Bold as this seems, he is allowed to proceed, and to confirm his complaints by facts. If everything is wrong, let Habakkuk give the facts. These he gives. He has prayed, and God has not answered; he has called for divine help, and divine help has not come; dishonesty and violence prevail; the law is out of date; nobody regards it; justice is a thing of the past, but not of the present; the wicked oppresses the righteous; judicial decisions carry with them no authority. Now that was a terrible state of things truly. What made Habakkuk

feel especially grieved just now was that the brightest hopes of the nation had just gone out in deepest darkness. After the long night of idolatry in the reigns of Manasseh and Amon, a brighter day had dawned with good King Josiah on the throne. The nation began to recover hope. Josiah's reign promised the return of splendor and piety to the land. But in the morning of his life he is cut down. With his death Judah's fair prospect is overcast with threatening clouds once more. It seemed as if nothing good could thrive in Judah. Only wickedness seemed to have a lease on life and power. To be righteous seemed enough to forfeit prosperity and reap disaster. Wicked Manasseh reigns for fifty years. Good Josiah perishes in his youth. This was more than Habakkuk could understand. He appeals to God to solve the mystery.

(*b*) Jehovah gives Habakkuk a vision. But so far from solving the mystery the vision seems to make the matter worse. Judah is wicked; therefore Judah suffers; and Judah shall suffer yet more. Behold the vision, Habakkuk. The prophet looks up. What does he see? The Chaldean army marching directly from Babylon. How swift their movement! Their horses are swifter than leopards, and fiercer than evening wolves. The horsemen fly like eagles in their haste. Their faces sup up like the eastwind. They gather the captivity like the wind-drifted sand. In their strength they laugh at kings and princes. They build up earthworks or sand-banks or dust heaps against Jerusalem. And the city falls. In the vision Habakkuk hears the Chal-

dean conqueror boast of his own prowess, and attribute his success to his heathen god. Now, Habakkuk, are your doubts removed? Judah is punished for Judah's sins. No; his perplexity is greater than before.

(*c*) The Chaldeans are worse than Judah. If the men of Judah are punished for their fewer sins, how do the Chaldeans escape all punishment for their greater crimes? Wherefore holdest Thou Thy tongue, when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he? How is it that Judah is driven to exile for Judah's sins, and Chaldea marches on to victory, though guilty of more and viler sins? Where is the justice of such dealing? Habakkuk, to enforce this difficulty, ventures to present a vision to the divine eye.

There is a sea. Its surface is covered with fishermen. Some fish with hooks, some with nets, and some with drags. They are very successful. They attribute all their success to their hooks, nets, and drags. They even go so far as to sacrifice to their nets, and burn incense to their drags. Now the people of Judah are the fishes in the sea. It seems that anybody can come and fish for them. When they have caught them, they do not give God the praise as if they were God's servants. But they say it is the work of these hooks and nets and drags. They sacrifice to them. Indeed, it seems as if it was the hooks and nets and drags. It seems as if providence had nothing to do with it. Will the Lord let them go on at this rate, emptying their nets and catching more? This seems very bold and defiant

for a creature in the presence of the great Creator. But Habakkuk puts in one saving clause. "Thou are of purer eyes than to behold evil." God is good. There must be some explanation for all this. Man may not see it. But the reason exists, though it be unknown. For the reason man may ask; humbly ask. The curtain falls.

II.—HABAKKUK ON THE WATCHTOWER: THE WATCHING PROPHET

This scene is very different from the first. As the former vision vanished, the prophet was prostrate in the dust. His words were many, and complaining, and almost defiant. We look again. He has risen from the dust. He has left the place of prayer. He has climbed up into a tower. From the depths he has mounted to the heights. We see him perched up on the summit of his tower. "I wlll stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved." Here mark several features of this picture of the watching prophet.

1. Why is Habakkuk on the Tower?—His sudden transition is not without a reason. There is a time to pray, and there is a time to watch. He prayed, and now he has become a watchman. It seems that Jehovah did not answer his prayer immediately. At any rate, he did not solve the mystery while the prophet prayed. Either by the promptings of his own heart, or by some heavenly impulse, he is moved to ascend his tower to watch for an answer to his

prayer. Why is he on the watchtower? To see some vision granted there, that shall roll off the burden of his doubts and difficulties. It may be inferred that the prophet was alarmed at the boldness in which he had just indulged, at the defiance which he had seemed to assume. He desired also to see "what I shall answer, when I am reproved."

2. The Watching Prophet Is Silent.—The praying Habakkuk was full of words. The watching Habakkuk is clothed with quietness. See him in the tower! Not a word he speaks. His eyes are busy; his lips are sealed. No human voice breaks the stillness of the scene. God's voice alone is heard. All the words of this second scene are heavenly words. A seeming defiance has yielded to profound reverence and deepest humility. Appropriately this scene ends with the heavenly command: "The Lord is in his holy Temple: let all the earth keep silence before him."

3. The Solution to His Difficulty, which God gives him on the tower, Habakkuk is commanded to publish in a remarkable way. The solution is not for Habakkuk alone. It is for his countrymen as well. It is for all those who with him are oppressed with doubts, and with him have obtained like precious faith. Habakkuk, write it out. Let it not be handed down by tradition, lest it be corrupted. It is a jewel worthy of safe transmission to the distant ages. Write it! Write it clearly, Habakkuk, so that the untaught can grasp the thought. Clearly, for it is a truth worthy an entrance into every heart. Habakkuk, write it in a large, round hand, so that

he that readeth it may quickly run and publish it abroad. It is a truth worthy of being known everywhere. Yet once more, Habakkuk, write it on tables; not on one, but on many; and post them up so that the precious truth may not be hidden in a corner, or stored away in a watchtower, or buried in a prophet's heart; but may be heralded abroad. Silently the prophet wrote out the heavenly answer.

4. The Heavenly Solution.—The problem is a very serious one. The riddle is a very difficult one. The mystery is profound. A righteous, omnipotent God and a world that groans with injustice, violence and corruption. Habakkuk has spent years in trying to explain the seeming inconsistency. Giving it up as a hopeless task, he throws himself on God for help. In the vision of the watchtower God, in ten Hebrew words, in twenty English words, explains the mystery; brings order out of chaos; disperses darkness with Heaven's glowing light; and rolls away the burden which had long oppressed a prophet's heart. Take in your hand a bunch of keys. Enter a long passageway on which open numerous doors. Unlock the doors. You try all your varied keys on this door and on that. But you fail. The intricacy of each lock becomes a mystery that unravels not in obedience to all your keys. The locksmith comes, and with one key, but that a magic master key, pries into the mystery of each hidden lock. At his touch the bolt flies back, till all the doors are open. Habakkuk had tried all his keys, and still the mysteries of providence remained fast locked. God gives a key, one key, but of heavenly mysterious power.

As it touches each mystery, the bolt flies back, and all is clear as day.

It is time to tell what this solution is. Hear it in God's own words: "Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith." Is the Chaldean lifted up? Remember, that in all his proud elevation his soul is not upright. There is a charge against him, that is not and will not be erased. He has a loose rope, but he is going to hang himself with it. His soul is wrong, and the soul is after all the man. Who will envy the doomed culprit that plays with the rope that presently shall hang him? What inmate of the jail, looking out through iron grating, envies the criminal's freedom who goes outside the prison walls but to the scaffold? Hear, then, the doom of the prosperous wicked, and envy him not: "His soul which is lifted up is not upright in him." His prosperity is like the gentle tones which mark the sheriff's voice, as he pulls down the hood over the culprit's face, and touches the spring that leaves him dangling in the air. Will you envy that? Habakkuk, it is better to be an oppressed Israelite than a proud Chaldean.

Is Judah down? Remember, that in all his degradation the just shall live by faith. The soul is the measure of the man. What the soul is, is the prophecy of what the man shall be. If that soul is right, within there is life immortal. That righteousness is marked. God will not forget it. The man that is conscious of a pure heart, no matter what his surroundings, can afford to wait on God. Let him live the

life of faith—the just shall live by faith. Take this key, and unlock every mystery. It never fails. If your difficulty is the prosperity of wickedness, apply the key: "Behold, his soul that is lifted up is not upright in him." If your difficulty is the adversity of the righteous, apply the key: "Behold, the just shall live by his faith."

Now was not it worthy of being written down in a large, plain hand on numerous tables, where everybody could see? Yes; prophet never did a better, grander, nobler work than when he wrote those few Hebrew words. Long after he had come down from his tower and slept with his fathers his tablets shone with the undimned brightness of this heavenly truth. Paul's eye caught the brilliant inscription, and he reiterated and rewrote the truth, "The just shall live by faith." Luther, in a day much like that in which Habakkuk lived, sighed and prayed, and prayed and sighed, until a new light dawned upon his soul, a light shed from this precious truth: "The just shall live by faith." This watchtower vision gave us the letter to the Romans, and to the Galatians, and to the Hebrews. It gave us the Reformation. Habakkuk, write it plain and large, that he that readeth it may run, and shout its tidings, till they roll over all the world. The curtain falls upon the watchtower, and we await the final scene.

III.—HABAKKUK WITH THE HARPSTRINGS: THE SINGING PROPHET

The scene opens, and we behold not the pleading prophet, not the watching prophet, but we see

Habakkuk with a harp in his hand. His lips move in song. The notes of his voice blend with the melody of his harp tones. In spite of his harsh name, he is now, in this third scene, all poetry and music. We have recorded the very tune to which he sings his glowing words," Shigionoth"—"Triumph." If the name at all suits the tune, the tune was admirably adapted to Habakkuk's triumphal song. Delivered from all his difficulties, from all his doubts, he now pours out his liberated and rejoicing soul in a grand psalm of praise. Two remarks may be made about this psalm.

1. The Style of Its Poetry.—It places its author at a bound in the front rank of poets. There are generally recognized four departments of poetry. The epic and the dramatic are scarcely found in the Bible. They yield the palms to Homer and Shakespeare. The other two sorts are the didactic and the lyric. To these principally Hebrew poetry belongs. In each of these the Hebrew poet bears off easily the palm of unrivaled excellence. The Proverbs of Solomon are unapproached as didactic poetry. They constitute a class apart; wisdom arrayed in choicest language and dressed in the beauty of poetic imagery. In the department of lyrics, Pindar, Anacreon, and Horace wear no brighter crowns than David and his associates in the composition of the Psalms. Among the Psalms themselves this lyric of Habakkuk is equal to the best. Such is the eminence claimed for this Psalm of Habakkuk. Among all those whose poetic numbers are

set to music, and sung to the sweet strains of harp or lyre, Habakkuk is unsurpassed. David wrote more, but not more beautifully than Habakkuk. He is one of the greatest of the minor prophets; great even among the giant prophets themselves. A severe critic coldly remarks: "In prophecy he is the peer of Joel, Amos, Nahum, Isaiah. In the lyrics he surpasses everything which the poetry of the Hebrews can display." The meaning of such an opinion can be estimated only when it is remembered that it pronounces Habakkuk's Psalm superior to David's 19th, 23rd, 103d, 119th, and many others that are enshrined in all Christian hearts.

Reader of the Bible, did you know that there was hidden behind this harsh sounding name a psalm of such exquisite beauty that in its light David's gems of thought lose something of their luster? Shall we not seek earnestly to resurrect this long-buried bard? Shall we not trace these neglected pages, to scan their beauty or to catch their glow? Benjamin Franklin was at the court of France in its most ungodly day. In a club of infidels the Bible was the subject of ridicule. Franklin seemed not to notice their ridicule. In a momentary pause he began to read aloud a passage from an old book. All listened and praised the passage as sublime, and wondered where he had found the treasure. It was the Psalm of Habakkuk. Its grandeur thrilled them, and evoked their hearty praise. To know and to admire Byron, Burns, Moore, and others who have sung with captivating music in their

charming words is well; but it seems not right that the splendid psalm of Habakkuk should lie buried in the Book of books untraced, unread, unknown. Resolve to know it. With knowledge will come due admiration for its rare excellence and extraordinary worth.

2. The Line of Its Thought.—May we venture to point out the beauties of this psalm? What words can tell how the ocean roars, or how the birds sing? We can only say, come, hear them. Come, read the famous Psalm. Let us only give its barest outline. God comes, comes in grandeur. His brightness is the light. Forked lightnings are in His hands. Pestilence goes before Him. Diseases, like burning coals, go forth at His feet. He pauses to measure the earth; to send His lightning here, and pestilence there, and diseases yonder. The mountains bow before Him, and the hills melt like wax. The prophet trembles too at the fierceness and the power that rives the mountains, piles up the sea, and divides the rivers, and rocks the hills. He is afraid. But in his fear he sees that all these terrible phenomena are to make way for the chariot of salvation. Amid the terrors of the scene the trembling prophet hears the rumbling of the chariot wheels; then sees the chariot itself. Its name is inscribed npon it, "Chariot of Salvation." The prophet gets in and is safe. The troubles over which he had murmured were only to clear the way for the chariot, in which he is now safely borne. As he steps in he closes his song: "Although the fig tree shall not

blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labor of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation."

X

JEREMIAH

"Jeremiah."—JEREMIAH 1: 1.

IN one respect at least Jeremiah differs from the other prophets. The recorded facts of his life are very numerous. His prophecies are liberally interspersed with personal incidents. It is easier than in other instances to become acquainted with the prophet as a man. The story of his life is interwoven with the record of his work. The arrangement of his prophecies is somewhat intricate. But through it all much of the prophet's life stands out in bold relief.

Consider the personal incidents in Jeremiah's recorded work.

I.—JEREMIAH'S CALL TO THE PROPHETIC OFFICE

A youth sits upon the throne of Judah, Josiah, good and great. The ruddy glow of life's morning has not yet faded from his cheeks. The land is governed by a boy; and the land rejoices in his rule. It is striking contrast with what preceded him. Let us go from the royal city, where the boy king reigns. We leave the north gate of the city, turn slightly to the east, and three miles brings us to a

village called Anathoth. It is by no means unknown in Jewish history. To trace its renown, however, is foreign to our purpose now. Isaiah called it "Poor Anathoth." We enter the village. From it we can just see the summit of Olivet. Its sunlit dusky groves tell us where Jerusalem is. From it we have a view of the desolate scenery that skirts the Dead Sea. A drearier view is seldom found, than that which spreads out before "poor Anathoth." But why are we here? Not to look upon the scene of desolation. There are attractions which the village has. Anathoth is a Levitical city in the Tribe of Benjamin. We enter the house of Hilkiah, where dwells a priestly family of high connections. Though dwelling in a humble village, this family is closely connected with the great families of Jerusalem, families that dwell even in the royal palace, and are familiar with the king.

We are not the only visitors at the priestly house to-night. There comes One alone. His footstep is not heard. His entrance is not announced. He comes upon a special mission. It is the divine Spirit who comes to call a prophet to his work. Who think you is the one thus called? Is it the old priest? No; the Spirit passes by age, honor and fame. He hovers over the chamber where sleeps a gentle boy. We may not have noticed him in our visit to the priestly house. But the Spirit noticed him, marked him as his own, and came to call him to a great and noble work. Look at the boy as he sleeps. He is only twelve years of age. The young Jeremiah has sported over the hills in boyish glee, and now

he rests. A presence in the house unseen is felt. A voice breaks the midnight silence; a heavenly voice. Hear! "Jeremiah, before I formed thee I ordained thee for a prophet's work." What! the boy? Yes; hear him. "Ah, Lord God, I cannot speak; I am a child." The Lord: "Thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and speak whatsoever I command." The Lord put forth his hand and touched the boy's mouth. "Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth." The nature of the young prophet's work is clearly revealed to him. "To pull down and to build up"; the prophet of woe and comfort.

Ere the spirit leaves the wondering child He gives him two visions that illustrate the nature of his work. "Jeremiah, what seest thou? I see a rod of an almond tree." "Thou hast well seen; I will hasten my word to perform it." The rod means punishment on Judah. The almond is the earliest tree to blossom; hence its Hebrew name "sheked"—hasty tree. The rod of almond means hasty punishment. The young prophet shall pronounce the hastening doom of Judah. Through all his years of prophetic work he never failed to hold up the almond rod.

Once more. "What seest thou?" "I see a seething pot, and its face is toward the north." The hastening doom is severe, like the seething of the pot, boiling over a heated fire. And its face pointed northward. Thence would come the fire that makes it boil. It was a Chaldean fire that would seethe the people of Judah.

The two visions bring out four points: punish-

ment, the rod; speedy, the almond; severe, seething; Chaldean, north. They are the keys that unlock the mysteries of Jeremiah's prophetic work. Always think of Jeremiah as holding an almond rod in his hand and by his side a seething pot facing north.

The gentle boy shrinks from the call to such a work. He would far rather live unknown in "poor Anathoth." He would far rather sport among its hills and glens. He would far rather gaze upon its desolate scenery. He has no desire to take upon his frail shoulders the burden of prophetic work. He pleads excuse, because he is a boy. But God insists. Then like a man in heart, though a child in years, he yields, obeys, and enters on his work. We think of a Hebrew prophet as old and gray-haired, and stern and awe-inspiring, as one of whom to be afraid. Here is one at least who even in childhood heard the call and entered on the work. Here at least is a boy of tender age, of gentle spirit, shrinking nature, of loving heart, withal a prophet of the Lord. The early chapters of Jeremiah are perhaps the only portion of the Bible that was composed by an inspired boy. With what intense interest and with what power to youth this portion of the Word must make appeal.

II.—JEREMIAH'S EARLY WORK

What did the boy prophet do in his boyhood? So interesting and so isolated a fact as his early call and early ministry makes us inquisitive to learn what was the special work accomplished by him ere

the freshness of his youth is lost in the cares of maturer age. What could a boy-prophet do? Let us remember that Jehovah's hand touched his mouth. Then let us trace his work. The first thing to notice is that he abode still at Anathoth; that is, he regarded Anathoth as still his home. In the five years immediately following his call he was engaged in two prophetic missions.

First, by divine command he goes to Jerusalem. Child of a rustic village, he enters splendid and royal Jerusalem. He had often been there as a visitor and a worshiper. Now by a wonderful and sudden transition he goes a prophet of Jehovah. He makes an earnest appeal for God. His is the threefold eloquence of deep piety, youthful ardor, and heavenly inspiration. While a threefold cord is not easily broken, this was broken. His mission produced no effect. Every word he spoke seemed to come back a lonely echo to his earnest voice. He runs up and down the streets of Jerusalem to seek a man, if only one can be found who is upright and truthful. He finds not one. He reminds us of Diogenes, except in age, who in broad daylight with lamp in hand went peering through the streets of Athens looking for an honest man, and finding none. Many doubtless turned with scorn from the young prophet, unwilling to learn from childhood's lips. Having finished that Heaven-appointed mission, though it seemed very unsuccessful, he climbed over the hills, and is soon at home again at Anathoth.

Second, after five years of silence, he is sent on another mission. This time his field is enlarged.

The book of the law long hidden had just been found in Josiah's day. The people of Jerusalem were very ignorant of the long-buried law; much more the people of the rural districts. The newly discovered law must be proclaimed to them. A preacher must go all around the land, and tell of that newly-found law. Who shall go? A heavenly call is made on the youth of Anathoth. He enters on an official tour to all the cities of Judah to proclaim the resurrected law of God. He is now about seventeen years of age. In the streets of Jerusalem, in the streets of Bethlehem, in the streets of Hebron, from the heights of Anathoth to the lowlands of Beer Sheba, from the sea-coast to the Jordan, the young man's voice is heard, ringing like a trumpet over hilltop and lowly vale, until the people throughout the realm have heard of Judah's forgotten Lord and God's forgotten law. His work done, and faithfully done, he comes back to Anathoth.

Two missions he has performed, both bold and grand, and yet the dew of youth is on the young prophet's brow. He comes to Anathoth, his home. Will his villagers give him an ovation, seeing what he has done? Will they welcome home the youth who has conferred great honor on their town? Will they proclaim the young man's praise? Surely he seemed worthy of such recognition. Cities are quick to claim honor for their own. Jeremiah had preached the truth untrimmed. The wicked like not the truth, like not to have it thrust upon them by their juniors; especially by one of their own community. The young prophet comes back home to

find his village in a fever of excitement. A deep, malignant plot has been laid to take the young prophet's life because of the ringing truth he spoke in all the land. No word of welcome greets him, but a threatening scowl. He carries his cause to God. God relieves his fears by telling him: "The men of Anathoth who seek thy life shall die, but thou shall live." As a home the village has lost its charm to Jeremiah; for what is home without love? The young prophet bids adieu to the scenes of his childhood and, just ripening into manhood, moves to Jerusalem; and there he abides.

III.—JEREMIAH'S FRIENDS AND FOES

What did Jeremiah gain by his removal to Jerusalem? Certainly not exemption from inquisitorial zeal. The spirit of Anathoth was the spirit of Jerusalem. He certainly gained an enlargement of his influence. Let us note his surroundings in his new residence. The expression has been used: "Jeremiah's friends and foes." Two great political parties in Judah now stand face to face, prepared for mortal combat. Each receives its name in reference to this young prophet: Jeremiah's foes and Jeremiah's friends. Our minds grasp the full force and significance of this only when we reflect that around this almost beardless youth surge the great billows of the stormy political sea. The boy that would have preferred to remain secluded at Anathoth ere he has put on the vigor of mature life becomes the brilliant center of the royal city.

His Foes.—Three heterogeneous elements unite in opposition to him. *The princes,* Hebrew born, but more than half-heathen in their creed, who in the Temple court turned their backs on Jehovah's altar and bowed toward the shrine of the sun on Olivet. It is not difficult to discern the reason of their opposition to the young prophet. Names of these: Pelatiah, Jaazaniah, Elishama, and Ishmael. *The priests* and *the prophets,* who had sold themselves to sin, quickly ranged themselves with the princes to oppose the youth from Anathoth. Their opposition was intensified by the fact that Jeremiah himself was a prophet and a priest. Fraternal hate knows no bound. Names of these: Pashur, Gedaliah, whole family of Shelemiah, Seraiah, Irijah, and Hananiah. These three elements, princes, prophets, and priests, had been at violent enmity against each other. The youthful Jeremiah enters the city, makes it his abode, and immediately these variant elements combine and present an undivided front, and an unwavering opposition to God's young servant.

His Friends.—Undaunted by such enmity, Jeremiah pursues his holy work, and there forms around him a party, which we call "His friends." A brilliant circle, whose more brilliant center is the youth himself. Among his friends we find Baruch, his most constant companion, and Ahikam and Gedaliah, his most powerful protectors. These were men of note, influence, and position. His foes were strong in numbers and in power; his friends strong in devotion, and in heroic faith. The nation was against him; but the noble little band of which he was soul

and life never prayed a truce, and never lowered its banner to the dust. His was the sad mission always to have a virulent opponent, his the happy event always to triumph over his foes. His the joyous mission always to have tried and faithful friends; always to lean on sympathizing love.

IV.—JEREMIAH'S CONFLICTS

A sweeter, kinder, gentler spirit than Jeremiah's never breathed. Yet we trace his life by conflicts, sighs, groans, and tears. He who would have chosen to muse away his life in the calm of Anathoth is made to toss upon a stormy sea. The natural outgrowth of the circumstances of his friends and foes would be trouble. The fruit is soon borne. Some of his troubles we shall now recount.

1. Jeremiah's Arrest.—There is one thing a party strong in numbers can always do, even when justice has fled and righteousness is unknown. It can arrest; it can use the lock and key. A vast assemblage is in the Temple court—priests, prophets, and people. Eagerly they gaze upon the now manly form of the young prophet. Rapt, though not approving, they listen to his earnest voice. A strong appeal he makes. He illustrates his appeal by a part of his raiment. He wears a girdle. It is old and rotten. Its history he gives. By command of God he bought it new. He went and hid it by Euphrates at the bidding of the Lord. After many days he brought it back and put it on. Behold, after its exposure it is good for nothing. The girdle is

these men of Judah, utterly ruined, and ruined by Euphrates, the river of Babylon. "Give glory to God before this darkness comes." "But if ye will not hear, my soul shall weep in secret places for your pride; mine eye shall weep sore and run down with tears, because the Lord's flock is carried away captive." Pathetic appeal! Appeal of love!

There is a momentary pause. The spell of eloquence is broken. They close upon him. Rough hands are laid upon his person. He is hurried to the Seat of Judgment, located at the Temple gate called "Gate of Jehovah." The prophets and priests are his accusers, the princes are his judges, the people are the idle lookers-on. What can he hope from such a court as that? The cause seems wholely in the hands of his foes. What is the charge? That he has predicted ruin to these Temple walls. They cry for the faithful prophet's life. He pleads for his life earnestly and well and boldly. His appeal moves at least one prince, who advocates his release. His plea is that Micah predicted the fall of Jerusalem and the ruin of the Temple walls, and Micah was allowed to live; why not Jeremiah? In this arrest and trial one of Jeremiah's friends covered himself with glory, with extraordinary courage standing faithful to his prophet friend. In the dark hour, when all seemed against the prophet, and his life hung by a slender thread, Ahikam boldly thrust himself in between his master and his enemies. The record is: "The hand of Ahikam was with Jeremiah that they should not give him into the hand of the people to put him to death." The

prophet is released. The court adjourns. The people scatter to their homes.

2. Jeremiah in the Stocks.—Judah is between two fires: Egyptian and Chaldean. Nearer and nearer these fires burn. Judah's choice rather seems to be by which she would prefer to be consumed. A dire alternative it surely is. Egypt threatening from the south, Chaldea threatening from the north, the question with Judah was which way to lean. The question must be quickly answered, for on they come, from north and south. Jeremiah throughout his course favored Chaldea. He advocates an immediate surrender to the Babylonian king. It is not because his spirit cowered, nor because of indifference to his country, that he advised surrender. He was a prophet, and he spoke in the light of results then future, the light which we now have, and which enables us to say that his advice was the best that could possibly have been given. Jeremiah stands in the vale of Hinnom, amid the potters and their wares. He takes up an earthen vessel and dashes it upon the ground, breaking it into pieces. So shall Judah be shivered, if Judah leans on Egypt. Then he climbs to the Temple hill, enters its court, and pours out his burning words of warning. But the princes and priests and prophets are for Egypt. Pashur, one of his foes, who is governor of the Temple, smites him, and puts him in the rack in the gate of Benjamin. Sad scene; and in Jehovah's house. Bound in body, his free spirit makes one of his loftiest flights, utters one of his fiercest invectives. Then by a natural and sad rebound he

droops in gloom, as if abandoned by man and God, and curses the day of his birth.

Come, let us shed a tear of sympathy for a crushed spirit, an overwhelmed though noble heart. Pilloried at the Temple gate, mocked by every passer-by, polluted by wicked rabble! How hard all this to bear! Come, let us speak a word of kindness to him, to soothe his sorrows and alleviate his suffering. One has preceded us. Baruch, the faithful friend, stands by Jeremiah's side. Though no stocks bind his feet and hands, he shares the ignominy of his friend. They are thrust into prison: one falsely charged with crime; the other rightly charged with friendship. Yet that prison cell becomes a sanctuary, where God reveals His presence, and accomplishes a grand and glorious work. There in a darkness, partially dispersed by a feeble prison lamp, but illumined by a heavenly light, Jeremiah dictated, and Baruch wrote, the prophecies in a book. When that book was cut up by the pen-knife of the king, patiently it was rewritten and enlarged in the same prison cell. It is that which largely constitutes the book of Jeremiah, as we have it in this day: the fruit of suffering, the reward of woe, the harvest of bitter tears!

3. Jeremiah's Conflict with Hananiah.—Released from prison, a little episode diversifies the sad tenor of his life. It seems that Jeremiah put a wooden yoke upon his neck and walked about the city. Thus he preached a sermon to the eye. Thus Judah would go to bondage in Chaldea. Many thought he was a madman. Hananiah, one of Jeremiah's foes, and a friend

of Egypt, meets the yoked prophet in the Temple court. Jeremiah said, "Serve the king of Babylon and live." Hananiah: "Ye shall not serve the king of Babylon." When the prophets disagree, who shall decide the strife? They shall decide it themselves. Hananiah takes Jeremiah's yoke off, and breaks it in pieces, saying, "Thus shall the bondage of Babylon be broken." He seemed to have triumphed over the prophet of Anathoth. But no. Jeremiah: "The wooden yoke shall be broken, only that ye may bear an iron yoke." As an evidence of this Hananiah shall die: "This year thou shalt die." So Hananiah died the same year in the seventh month.

4. Jeremiah in the Pit.—The day of Jerusalem's doom had dawned. The Chaldean forces appeared. The siege was about to begin. Jeremiah's words had utterly failed to accomplish the rescue of his beloved land from its hastening doom. As the shadows gathered over it, he resolved to leave the city, which he could not save. Whither shall he go? To Anathoth, childhood's happy home. He would go there and shut himself up amid its hills and glens. He goes, it seems, alone. He reaches the city gate, the gate called Benjamin. He is just going out. A rough hand falls on him, and he finds himself once more under arrest. "Deserting to the Chaldeans? You have always favored the Chaldeans. Now you would go over to them? Come back, and answer the charge of desertion." He is beaten and thrust into a prison. Yet even from this prisoner the king and nobles seek advice. He is then let down into

a deep well, from which all the water had been drawn. He sinks down into the mud and slime. There he is left. He will not need a trial. He will die there. No; a friend appears. Among the guard, a man of tender heart, Ebedmelech. He obtains permission to draw the prophet up. He lets down cords and soft rags to put under Jeremiah's arms, and lifts the prophet up. In prison a friend is with him, ever faithful Baruch.

Two beautiful scenes enliven this prison life of Jeremiah. (*a*) His remembrance of Ebedmelech's kindness. In the dreariness of his prison life he foretold that amid all the dangers and sorrows of the siege of Ebedmelech should be safe: "Thou shalt not fall by sword." (*b*) His purchase of a lot of land. He is sitting in his prison. His cousin comes to sell to him a lot of land, a family heirloom. What a time to buy—while the Chaldeans are thundering at the city gates! But, assured that the present cloud would pass away, believing in the glorious future of his land, he gives the practical proof of his belief in his own visions of future blessedness and prosperity, by paying down the price. He was ready not only to preach a sermon of words, but to live the doctrine of his lips. There in that prison he dwelt, during the fearful siege.

V.—JEREMIAH'S FINAL STRUGGLE

The city fell. It was a night of unutterable woes. A long band of exiles started for their captivity. A heart-sickening scene! Fair Jerusalem in ruins;

a people crushed. The prophet's fame had reached the Chaldean king. At the first halting of the captive train Jeremiah is found with the weeping exiles. Manacles are still upon his wrists. By royal command he is released. And free choice is given him of a place of high favor at the court of Babylon, amid its splendor and its wealth and luxury; or of abiding in his native, now desolate, impoverished, down-trodden land. What think you was his choice? The tendrils of his loving heart still entwined about the ruins of his native land. He had loved Jerusalem in her bright and happy days; had loved her in all her perils; had loved her when gathering clouds cast dark shadows on her glory; had loved her in her fall; still loved her shattered rocks and smouldering ruins; still loved her memories. He would not forsake her now. He turns his back on the proffered wealth, honor, fame, that flashed around the Babylonian king. Bade farewell to weeping exiles, and alone retraced his footsteps to the spot where once Skekinah dwelt, and wept tears over the fallen city of his love.

One of Jeremiah's friends is made governor of Judah. He is slain by one of Jeremiah's foes. The people, to escape the wrath of Babylon for that act, flee to Egypt, and forcibly carry Jeremiah with them. He is the only one of these prophets who ever trod the soil of Egypt and looked upon its pyramids and palaces. There in that foreign land, the land he most disliked, and against which he hurled so many judgments, the prophet died. The legends that are connected with his name are

almost innumerable. We cannot have failed to discern how much the leading features of his life are like his Master's. Some thought he lived again in Zechariah. At the time of Christ's birth he was daily expected to appear. Hence, when Jesus said to His disciples, "Who do men say that I, the son of man, am?" They said, "Some say John the Baptist: some, Elias: and others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets."

XI

EZEKIEL

"Ezekiel."—EZEKIEL 1: 3.

WE are now about to visit Ezekiel. He is a very strange man, unlike any that we have yet met in these studies of the prophets. His supreme characteristic is that his life was a prophecy. He prophesied more by the acts of his life than by the words of his mouth. Every act performed by him becomes a symbol, a sign of something, a vehicle of truth. His prophecies are acts; his words the running commentary on his acts. His life is a prophetic panorama. His words are as the words of him who stands by to explain the moving scene. He introduces not symbolic acts to illustrate his glowing words, as Isaiah or Amos does. But he introduces glowing words, to illustrate his symbolic acts. The acts are the main thing. Habakkuk is a great poet. Amos a great orator. Ezekiel a great actor. Natural enough, then, is it that the people say, as Ezekiel informs us, "what meanest thou by this?" They watched him, scanned every act, and readily supposed that every act and movement of the man meant something which they were concerned to know. His book presents Ezekiel to us in three general

aspects of his life. On him in these aspects we now would look. Ezekiel was thrice called to service.

I.—EZEKIEL CALLED TO PROPHETIC ACTS

His life during this period was a series of symbolic acts. Four prophets lived in his day. Each filled a sphere peculiar to himself. While Jeremiah wept over the desolations of Judah and abode in his native land, Ezekiel dwelling with the exiles on the banks of Chebar prophesied in the land of Babylon. The prophetic work in the land of Babylon was divided. Daniel prophesied at court. Obadiah hurled his solitary thunderbolt against a foreign power. Ezekiel addressed the captive Jews themselves. His home therefore is neither in Jerusalem with Jeremiah, nor at th royal palace of Babylon with Daniel, but in the dreary village on the bank of Chebar, where weeping captives mourned their fallen fortunes and the desolations of Jerusalem. It is an exile's home. His whole ministry was performed in exile.

There were four captive trains that had come from Jerusalem to Babylon. In the first Daniel came; in the second three thousand artisans; in the third, Ezekiel; then twelve years passed. Jerusalem fell. The fourth train started. From it Jeremiah turned back to weep out his life over the smouldering ruins of his beloved land. It will be thus seen that while Ezekiel's whole ministry is exercised in exile, it is partly before and partly after the fall of Jerusalem. A three-fold division of thought is the outgrowth of this fact: First, from the prophet's call

to the siege of Jerusalem; second, during the siege; third, after the siege and fall. This topical arrangement will prove a safe guide through the labyrinthine walks of Ezekiel.

1. His Call.—The kingdom of Judah was crumbling, but had not yet fallen. There were a few captives in Babylon, although a Hebrew king yet sat on David's throne. A young man thirty years of age walks out upon the bank of the quiet stream that glides by the village of exile Jews. He is alone. His thoughts are busy, musing over the destinies of his native and beloved land. From his reverie he is aroused by a sound and a scene. He hears a rushing wind. Ere he has time to look up, a heavenly brightness gleams around. He lifts his eye. Behold, a portentous cloud has gathered overhead. It is a cloud of fire, rolling in upon itself, arrayed in brilliant amber hue. As he gazes on the cloud in mute amazement four living creatures emerge from the fiery robes. As he gazes on the creatures four great wheels roll out to view, one by each living creature. The tires of the wheels reach from earth to heaven. They are full of eyes, and are very dreadful. Their color is beryl. As he gazes on these a throne appears, encircled with light, and arched by a rainbow. On the Throne sits one like the Son of Man. Dazzled by the brightness and overwhelmed by the transcendent glory of the scene, young Ezekiel falls on his face. A voice! "Stand on thy feet. I send thee to the children of Israel."

Ezekiel is called upon forthwith to perform the first of a long series of symbolic acts. What is he

doing? The Lord has written a long roll of judgments. He commands the new-made prophet to eat it up. He devours the roll of the judgments. God's judgments thus become incorporated into his very system. Thus he becomes a prophecy of reproof.

While we are watching him he starts off immediately from the river bank toward the plain. God has called him thither to be alone with Jehovah. The veil of secrecy hangs over his sojourn in the plain. This veil we may not seek to penetrate. Then he comes home, shuts himself up in his home, to come forth only at the divine bidding and in the performance of prophetic work. Thus was he called and thus consecrated to his peculiar mission. From the moment of his call he yields to God implicit obedience. He is one of the most thoroughly consecrated characters in Scripture. We lose sight of the man in the prophet. The prophet loses sight of himself in his heaven appointed work. The amber fire seems to have kindled in his heart. The wings of cherubim seem to have lifted him above a groveling world. We left him shut up in his house. He comes forth only by divine command to perform symbolic acts. He is appointed to be a reprover of the people of God.

2. The Siege of Jerusalem.—Ezekiel is an artist prophet. He comes forth. Let us watch his acts, and learn God's will. He takes a tile, a burnt brick. He takes a sharp instrument, and carves upon the tile. He is drawing some scene on it. What is it? Look. Why, that is a picture of Jerusalem. There is Mount Zion and Mount Moriah and Olivet and

Kedron. But what are these around it? Battering rams and mounds and enemies. It is a siege. The besieging foes are many. Then he takes a sheet of iron and puts it between him and the picture of Jerusalem. His prophecies are to be against Jerusalem. Now the prophet lies down by the tile, on his left side 390 days; on his right side 40 days. Each day is for a year. 390+40=430. These are the years of bondage in Egypt, eminently suggestive to the exile Jews. Then again from Jeroboam's setting up the golden calves to the captivity there were 390 years. That was Israel's sin. From the broken treaty of Josiah's reformation to the captivity there was a period of 40 years. That was Judah's sin. After this Ezekiel is bound so that he cannot move. He is fed on meanest food prepared in a most loathsome way.

Now is there any difficulty in interpreting a prophecy like that, a prophecy acted out before the eyes? What does it mean but that Jerusalem shall fall; after a protracted siege; during which bread shall be scarce, and after which its people shall be led into bondage. The years seem exactly measured.

3. The Shaven Seer.—Again from his retirement he comes. Eagerly we gather around him to see what strange act he will now perform. He is bald; but not with age. With a razor he has shaved off all his hair. He has his balances, and he is weighing his tonsured locks. Then he divides the weight by three, and so divides the hair. A third part he smites with the knife. A third part he burns in the fire. A third part he scatters to the winds. A

few reserved single hairs he binds about his person. What does all this mean? The Jews shall be shaven from their land. A third part shall fall by the fires of pestilence. A third part shall fall on the edge of the sword. A third part shall be borne by adverse winds to exile lands. Then he smites his hands and stamps his feet in the fury of his judgment. His soul boils over in fierceness of his invectives. Two sharp truths he utters here. "The rod has blossomed." As if, when every man sins, there were a rod planted, planted in the seed. He sins on, and the rod grows on. He fancies himself secure because no punishment is felt. But the rod grows stronger year by year. At last it blossoms. It is ready. Its stroke is felt. The rod has blossomed. The punshment is at hand. "The chain is forged." Exiles are led by a chain that passes from neck to neck. The chain is forged. A wicked and rebellious people shall soon feel its weight and hear its clanking links.

4. A Dreamy Visit to Jerusalem.—Ezekiel is in a trance. He dreams. It is a dream, because Ezekiel only seemed to go. His house was a great resort for the elders of the exiled Jews. They often visited the prophet to learn the will of God. Elders are before him. He is in a trance. His spirit wings its way to Jerusalem, and his lips tell the waiting exiles what he sees. Imagine the scene. In profoundest silence all listen. The prophet speaks of what is going on three hundred miles away in Jerusalem. He tells it all, as if he were not in Chaldea on Chebar's bank, but in Jerusalem. Hear him!

He is in the Temple. He is horrified at an image there, image of a heathen god, the Syrian god of love. Yet a greater abomination awaits him still. There is a hole in the wall. He enlarges it and creeps in, and finds himself amid wicked abominations. There saw he what Israel did in the dark. Yet there is still a greater abomination. At the gate of the Lord's House women, daughters of Zion, are weeping, not over the sins of the land, but over the flight of a heathen goddess. Yet is there a greater abomination. In the Temple court princes are turning their backs on God's altar, and bowing to the heathen shrine that stood amid the dusky olives of Olivet.

But the saddest scene is yet to be narrated. What does he see? The symbol of God's presence, the Shekinah, that long had gleamed with heavenly resplendence in the Holiest of all, leaves the Mercy Seat, where for ages it has been overshadowed by Cherubic wings, and stands upon the threshold, as if its departure might call a reeling nation to its sense of right. But no! It moves, and perches on the east gate of the Temple. Will they not pause in their reckless course? No; a prince speaks out: "It is not near; let us build houses." The prince falls dead. Again, Shekinah rises from the east gate. Slowly it passes over Kedron's vale. It rolls up the side of Olivet, and perches on its height. Thence the glorious light is rapt away from earth to heaven. Just as in after days Jesus was borne from earth by clouds, his feet last treading the heights of Olivet. Jehovah is gone! The land is

doomed. The vision is past, Ezekiel is at home again on Chebar's bank in Chaldean land.

5. A Pilgrim Prophet.—There is a commotion within Ezekiel's house. He is packing up all his household furniture, ready for removal. In the morning it is all brought out, and placed without the doors. But no prophet appears. Where is Ezekiel? Has he fled? No; only wait, and you will soon find him. The door of his house is shut and locked. There is somebody within, for we hear work going on within. Somebody is digging away inside. You hear the heavy blows, though you see no man. Noonday comes and passes, and still the mystery is unsolved. Evening comes. As the twilight gently falls, the digging sounds louder and clearer. At length we see a hole in the wall of Ezekiel's house, made from within outward. The prophet creeps out. He takes his stuff upon his shoulders. He covers his face with a veil, so that he cannot see the ground on which he walks. He goes forth before them all.

An exile stops him: "Ezekiel, what dost thou mean?" The prophet explains: Jerusalem shall fall. Its gates shall be shut and barred. Its fallen king shall escape by a rupture of the wall. His face shall be veiled, that he may pass unknown. But he shall be captured. He shall be brought to Babylon, but shall not see Babylon, though he shall die there. How is that? In Babylon and yet not see Babylon? Yes; so it proved. The captured king came to Babylon, but with sightless eyes.

6. The Two Riddles.—(*a*) Two eagles. One has

great long wings of variegated hues. Soaring amid the heavens, he lights on the dizzy heights of the cedars that crown Mount Lebanon. The eagle plucks the seed of the giant forest tree, then spreads his unwearied wings, and ceases not his flight till he comes to a distant land of merchandise and fertility. Then he plants the exile seed in the strange soil of Babylon. The other eagle comes from the south. But ere he comes, before the whirr of his wings is heard, the roots and branches of the trees of Palestine bend toward him, as if bowed by a tornado from the north. They seem to invite the southern eagle. He alights amid the forest boughs, but only to do as the other did to pluck the seed and plant them in a foreign soil, or pluck the roots, and leave them to whither and to die. What are these eagles? Babylon and Egypt. (*b*) A lion's lair. The lioness nourishes her whelps. She rears one, and makes of him a young lion. He goes forth to catch prey, and devours men. The nations hear of it; lay a snare; capture the young lion; bind him with chains; and carry him down to Egypt. Nothing discouraged, the lioness makes of her whelps another young lion. He went forth and annoyed the country by his pillage and his roaring. The nations capture him, and carry him bound to Babylon. What does it mean? Jehoahaz was carried to Egypt bound; Jehoiachim to Babylon; each a lion of Judah's tribe.

7. The Prophet's Fire.—He makes a great heap of fuel. Puts a caldron on. Puts water in it. Puts in the choicest parts of the flock. He seethes it thoroughly. It was the day, the awful day, on

which, three hundred miles away, the terrible armies of Babylon were closing on Jerusalem. The day on which the siege began was that on which Ezekiel kindled the fire under the caldron, to portray the terrible suffering of the protracted siege.

As if that figure was not enough, when its fires died away, and Ezekiel returned to his house, it was only to close in death the eyes of his beloved wife. "At even my wife died." Pile sorrow on sorrow, yet the gathered heap shall not equal the sufferings of Jerusalem. Not a tear the prophet shed. Not a groan he uttered. He is forbidden to mourn his wife. He is a type of grief too deep for tears; too profound to be relieved by wails. From the grave of his wife he returns to his home, smitten dumb. The grief which found no relief in tears has been too terrible to bear. From the moment that the gates of Jerusalem are barred against besieging foes, the prophet's lips are sealed. Sealed they shall remain, until a fugitive arrives to tell that the siege is over, and Jerusalem is fallen.

II.—EZEKIEL CALLED TO PROPHETIC SILENCE

Ezekiel is dumb. Forbidden to utter a prophecy to the exiles during all the siege of Jerusalem, a period of eighteen months, he is not to be altogether idle. Jonah had gone to Nineveh. Nahum had hurled divine judgments against the walls of the Assyrian capital. Habakkuk had foretold the fall of Babylon. Ezekiel turns his eagle eyes over the nations, and records their coming down. Interest-

ing fact it is, that while heathen warriors thundered at the gates of the Holy City, while Jerusalem was crumbling under the fierceness of their assaults, an exile prophet in a distant land, divinely moved, was hurling unerring and fatal darts upon the triumphal kingdoms of the world. During these eighteen months Ezekiel may be considered the great undertaker of the nations. He digs one huge grave and in it buries seven nations, seven powerful realms. Or if we prefer, we may regard him rather as sounding their funeral dirge, as one after another of these people are by prophetic words laid low beneath the valley-clods. He exults over the vision of seven national deaths—of kingdoms each of which in his day was on the pinnacle of power and glory. No fading luster suggested such a hastening doom. It was prophetic ken. The first toll of Ezekiel's great funeral bell proclaims the death of Ammon. They clap their hands when Israel fell. When they die Ezkiel sounds the solemn funeral bell. The second toll! Let the friends of Moab mourn. A third toll! From the south the wail is heard as Edom falls, and her royal cities of Bozra and Petra in ruins lie. The fourth toll! The breezes from the coast waft the tidings that fair Philistia is robed in mourning for her dead. The fifth is a louder and deeper toll. As it sounds, the prophet utters a wail, though it is over Israel's fallen foe. Hear how he describes the fall of Tyre. A stately ship sails proudly over subject seas. Her snow white sheets are Egyptian linen. Her decks are draped in purple from the isles of Greece. Her sailors and her pilots are

merchant princes. She is of perfect beauty. Gaily she rides the gently rolling sea. A storm from the east breaks over her. In all her beauty and her glory, she goes down to the sad music of a universal dirge. All weep over her. Tyre is gone! Ezekiel sounds the funeral bell. The sixth toll! Sidon, Tyre's twin sister, follows to the grave. Her ancient glories all are spoiled. Seventh and last toll! Loud and prolonged it sounds. Repeat it, for a mighty kingdom falls. A wail comes up from the distant south. The greatest of the ancient nations, the most civilized, learned, polished, skilled in art, has fallen. Take off the diadem. Remove the white royal robe. Embalm the corpse. The end has come. Royal Egypt is dead. She is buried not in her grand pyramids; not in her colossal palaces; not in her great temples; not in her noble river. She is hurled into the dark abyss where sleep the seven nations whose funeral dirge Ezekiel sounds. The grave is full. The last long funeral toll has died away.

III.—EZEKIEL CALLED TO PROPHETIC SPEECH

Ezekiel is as eloquent in words as in acts and silence. The eighteen months during which Jerusalem was besieged wore wearily away to the exiles on the banks of Chebar. Their loved city was besieged, and their honored prophet was dumb. The monotony of their life is destined now to a speedy relief. Upon the horizon of the vast plain a fugitive appears. He hastes. Clouds of dust rise around him. He speeds to Chebar's banks. Panting and

exhausted, he reaches the exile settlement. He searches out the prophet, finds him, and exclaims: "The city is smitten." The long-sealed lips of Ezekiel are parted. The silent tongue speaks. Ezekiel is no longer dumb. Now what will he say? What shall be the nature of his message? We feel almost afraid of Ezekiel. Those lips of his, while they spoke, uttered only judgments. When sealed in silence, he sounded only the knell of the nations. What will he say now? When Jerusalem was threatened, Ezekiel uttered fiercest invectives aganst the guilty men of Judah. Now that the city has fallen, how fierce will be his words of condemnation! No! Wonderful transformation! The fiercest reprover becomes the tenderest consoler. His harsh words and harsher acts are lost in the gentlest, sweetest consolations that are recorded in the old time word of God. His fierce eagle eye is softened into love. His frown is smoothed into a sweet and gentle smile. The man whose appearance and acts had repelled familiarity now invites our love, and bids us receive the strong hand grasp of a sympathizing friend. This change is so marked that some critics have said there were two Ezekiels. Well, there were two; but it may be two in one.

The last act in the tragedy of Jerusalem was performed. The darkest hour had come. But there was a song in the night, the deep midnight hour; a song not of sadness, not of reproof, but of peace and joy and hope. The sweet singer is Ezekiel. Would you like to know how he was thus changed? How his heart was so transformed? How was his voice

thus attuned to the sweet melody of hope? Let us draw near and listen to Ezekiel's third call. Alone he stands upon the Babylonian plain. God trains the great in loneliness. He prepares for great service in solitude. It is a desert tract. Winds sweep untrammeled over the treeless sands. Many a pilgrim and traveler has sighed out his life under that blazing sun and on that bleeching bed of drifted sand. Ezekiel stands there. What does he see? Bones of man and beasts, bleached in the sunlight by the desert fires, by the heated breath and scorching, shadeless sea of sand. The prophet walks among these sad relics of life and hope. In the stillness of this death-scene a voice from heaven is heard: "Son of man, can these bones live?" He answered: "Lord, thou knowest." He must have trembled as his voice echoed among the dead. God spoke: "Bid them live." And he bade them—it must have been most tremblingly. As he bade them, hark! a noise! a shaking! and a movement! The bones came together, bone to his fellow bone. These skeletons stood up entire. A field of skeletons! Then sinew and flesh appeared, and clothed the bones. They are yet but corpses. There is no life in them. The prophet finds himself amid a company of the dead. Their eyes are turned on him, but they are glazed and sightless eyes. They are still held by the bands of death. At God's command Ezekiel says: "Come, O breath." And in an instant they are all alive. Can these bones live? God can do anything. Life can come out of death at the divine command.

Is Israel dead? Are her hopes blasted? Is Israel like bleached bones? Can these bones live? Yes; says Ezekiel, they can, for he had seen life come forth out of death. There is a bright and glorious future for his exile brethren. He will tell them of it. He goes back to them. His face is radiant. His words are full of cheer. The desert of Israel's grief shall blossom as the rose. The clouds of her sorrow shall break. Through the rifts the bright light of hope and peace and joy shall shine. On the melting clouds the sun of truth and grace shall picture the welcome bow of promise. The herald of that happy day is Ezekiel. He strikes a new note, as soft and mellowed sound as ever sweetest music made. In perfect harmony his voice and song; his message and the spirit in which it is conveyed. The tender, gentle, word of hope he brings to cheer the saddened life of exiles on the banks of Chebar's placid stream concludes Ezekiel's ministry. The final note is the sweetest, clearest, best of all his music; a little gospel before the great Gospel day.

XII

DANIEL

"Daniel."—DANIEL 1: 6.

THE book of Daniel may be conveniently divided exactly into halves. The first half is history; the second half is prophecy. In the first half Daniel is introduced invariably in the third person; in the second half he is introduced in the first person. In the historical part he writes "Daniel"; in the prophetical, "I" and "me." In his book, which is not long, his own name occurs fifty times; a fact in striking contrast with other prophetic books, where the author's name is sometimes barely mentioned, and at most but slightly dwelt upon. Another respect in which this book stands aloof from all the the rest is its heading. We read "The book of the prophet Isaiah," "The book of the prophet Jeremiah," "The book of the prophet Ezekiel," but "The book of Daniel." As this book is different in the form of its title from the three great prophets just mentioned, so it is different from the minor prophets that follow. Their books are headed simply by the name of the prophet, as "Hosea." This is headed "The book of Daniel." The others are highly poetical; The book of Daniel is altogether prose. Daniel cannot be called a bard.

These dissimilarities are not accidental. What explanation have we of these striking facts? This explanation may be given. There are three descriptive words frequently and indiscriminately used in reference to these holy men of God—bard, prophet, seer. They are not interchangeable because they are synonymous, for they are not synonymous. Thus far they have been equally applicable to all the prophets, and have served to point out three prophetic features. In reference to Daniel, one only of these names can be rightly used. In this fact may be discerned his difference from all the rest. He is not a bard. His words are not poetical. He is not a prophet in the narrow, technical meaning of the word. He did not hold a prophetic office, as Ezekiel did. He lived in the court of Baylon, three hundred miles away from the exiles on Chebar. He was as far from them as was Jerusalem. He had no special personal contact with them. But he is a seer. He sees the future, and foretells its coming events. He has prophetic gifts. He exercises not specifically the prophetic office. There is nothing in all his book that intimates that God set him apart to the prophetic office or sent him to Israel, or to any other people, as His messenger. But to him a revelation of certain future events was made. In that sense he was not so much a prophet as a seer. Let us now turn to his personal history and work.

I.—DANIEL THE YOUNG CAPTIVE

It was a sad event when the banners of Jerusalem were lowered, and the city gates were opened, and the

foreign soldiers flooded the streets. Sad when the king of Judah took off his crown and laid it at the feet of the Babylonian conqueror. But it was sadder still, at least to parents' hearts, when it was noised abroad that the choice boys of Jerusalem were to be torn from their homes, and hurried off to a distant land of exile. How hearts must have trembled at the tidings! What anxieties, apprehensions, troubles must have shadowed every home in the land! What would home be, if all of its brightest and most precious jewels should be lost? There was one house in Jerusalem where little Daniel lived, just twelve years of age. It must have been a godly home. It bore such godly fruit. A noble boy, beautiful and fair and bright and good. He surely was the pride of the home circle, and the light of the dwelling. Bright hopes were centered in him. He was of royal blood. Who can tell what high aspirations found birth in parental hearts for the beloved boy? Yet in an instant all their bright hopes are dashed to the earth. The soldier's tread is heard. Daniel is seized. A hurried adieu to home and family, a final, lingering word of blessing, a parting prayer. The door is shut. The sunlight is forever driven from the home. Cries and tears are of no avail to avert the loss, of no avail to comfort the disconsolate. Young Daniel enters on the strange and trying scenes of exile life. Thus in the first train of exiles that passed from Jerusalem to Babylon is found this jewel of a boy, Daniel. As the jewel by its glow had cheered the home in which it

was found, so amid the dark scenes of exile its undimmed beauty and brightness ever shone.

There were three reasons why the king wished these boys: to enrich his kingdom by whatever was best and brightest in other lands; to gratify his pride in looking on them day by day, as trophies of his triumphant wars; to hold them as hostages for the right behavior of conquered Jerusalem.

They reach the splendid seat of Oriental empire, Babylon the great. Their childish eyes must have been delighted with the grand displays of wealth that flooded their vision from every side, a glory which outshone the glory even of Jerusalem. They are carried not through all this magnificence to some sequestered, darkened corner, which might be regarded good enough for an exile's dwelling-place. But they are conducted to its center. They are brought there where its utmost grandeur gleamed; there where its matchless beauty shone; there where its boundless wealth piled up every luxury which could gratify the body, feast the eye, and charm the ear, and fascinate the taste, sway the mind, subdue the soul. There they are stopped, and informed that they are at home. Among these adopted children of Babylon the Great the boy Daniel may be seen. Amid the brilliance of the scene he might be happy, if he could banish from his mind the memories of his native land and the truths indoctrinated in his religious home. Is it too much to imagine that, while other captive boys may be enraptured with the dazzling scene, Daniel, the jewel boy, of pious training and best home influence, gazes with amazement on all

the splendor that he sees, but gazes with a vision dimmed by tears, that unbidden fall at the thought of Judah's desolation.

II.—DANIEL THE YOUNG HERO

On the threshold of his new and brilliant abode trials meet him. Through them all a sublime heroism shines. A heroism that shines with a threefold light; a heroism that combines every element of a heroic nature. Remember, it is a boy in his thirteenth year, far from his home, bereft of a leading hand and a helpful word.

1. Heroic Endurance.—What he did not like, but was not a positive wrong, he resolved to endure. Heroically he bears the trial, if he can do so without sin. For instance, there is his change of raiment. A common exile was allowed to wear his own peculiar dress. Go to Chebar's bank, and you will find a Jewish settlement. Jewish dress, language, manners. But these captive boys must be arrayed in Babylonish robes. Now see the servants of the king take off from them their Jewish dress. They take from Daniel the robes around which his mother's arms had embraced him; the garments which perhaps her loving hands had woven or had fashioned. Was not that hard to endure? It touched his heart, but did not touch his conscience, and he endured.

Again, the common exiles kept their own names, names that were inwrought with memories of their land and their religion. Not so is it with the captive boys in Babylon. The name which a father gave,

and which has been mellowed by the tones of a mother's voice, must be given up. A new and foreign name must now be worn. It must have touched his heart, but as it did not touch his conscience, he endured, and answered to the name of Belteshazzar. A remarkable and interesting fact it is that while the three Hebrew youths, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, are known principally by their Babylonish names, and very few Bible readers can at once tell you what were their Jewish names, Daniel is known almost exclusively now by his Jewish name, and few are familiar with his Babylonish name.

2. Heroic Resistance.—Daniel knew when to endure, and when to resist. Though but a child, he records, not by pen, but by his living acts, a code of morals for all ages. The code may be briefly written. Brief as it is, it is a better moral philosophy than sometimes passes under that high sounding name. You can learn it easily, and you can read it in Daniel's life. Here it is: The heart bared must often receive, suffer, and endure painful wounds; the conscience must always wear a shield and never yield. Man is often called to endure that which sends an arrow to his heart. How it pains! Over it how he weeps! But man is never called to endure that which hurts the monitor within. Now it is remarkable that this boy should have thus early struck the very keynote of morals. The first sound proclaims the truth on which all right systems of morals invariably rest. There was no law against foreign robes. Hence he sacrificed his feelings and wore them. There was no law against foreign names.

Hence he sacrificed his heart impulse, and bore his new title without complaint. But what is this new trial? Why, the boys are to be fed from the king's table, and drink from the king's goblet. Against that there was a Jewish law. The child Daniel knew it. Now it is no longer the domain of heart, but of conscience. He firmly takes his stand. Can anything be more sublime? A tender child, who might seem to need a mother's care, who had received a mother's care, gathers up all the early taught lessons of truth, and with them shields his conscience against the invasion of the pomp and power of Babylon! A child against a kingdom! The beautiful reward of parents' faithful care.

3. Heroic Manners.—Daniel was resolved to die rather than to eat the polluted food. But he did not tell Ashpenaz so. He was deferential and polite. He made a polite request. True manners and true religion are never impolite. At first Ashpenaz says he does not exempt him from the requirement. But the boy politely pleads for a trial. Just for ten days let him and his fellows feed on pulse and water. Then if they be not ruddier and healthier, Ashpenaz can do with them as he pleases. Now look at the boys day by day. Daniel is their leader. They are far from the wholesome restraint of home. See them at their daily meal. The savory odors of royal viands fill the room. Wines of various kinds, and dates; liquors of all sorts sparkle on the board. The Hebrew boys eat their pulse, plain, wholesome food. Is not that heroic? Who is the leader? Daniel,

twelve years of age. The ten days pass. The Hebrew boys are the ruddiest in the realm.

III.—DANIEL THE DIVINER

The Hebrew boys were trained in the mysteries of Babylonian learning. They belonged to the class familiarly known as the wise men. On three occasions the pre-eminence of Daniel is evinced.

1. Nebuchadnezzar's First Dream.—Not more than two or three years after the Hebrew boys reached Babylon they observed on a certain day that the wise men of the city were all marching to the royal house. The king has had a bad dream, and is dreadfully worried about it. The sages are summoned to explain its meaning, and to relieve the king's anxious fears. That may not be very hard to do. They can give some meaning to the dream which may pacify the royal mind. So, confidently they march into the royal presence. "Tell thy servants the dream, and we will show the interpretation." Tell his dream? Why, he has forgotten it. Theirs is the task to recall the forgotten dream, and tell its meaning. In that they cannot easily deceive. For the king can surely recognize his own dream. Show the dream and its interpretation, and ye shall receive riches and honor. Fail to tell it and ye shall be slain. The wise men hang their heads, confess their ignorance, and withdraw. The decree is past.

Arioch sharpens his sword, and goes forth from the palace to slay the sages of the land. He enters the house where dwell the Hebrew youth, as if to

begin his slaughter with the blood of captives. The uplifted hand is stayed by the appeal of a youthful voice. It is Daniel's voice. He utters no wild lament over a harsh decree. "Give us time, and we will tell the king his dream and its meaning." A respite is allowed. But what can the boys do? What can they do? See! Look in on a beautiful picture of real life. An angry king in the palace. An obedient soldier with a keen-edged sword ready to slay the sages of the realm. Downcast magicians lamenting their cruel destiny. The boys, the four captive boys, where are they? In their house. See them engaged in prayer. Hear them, as in Hebrew accents they implore the aid of the Hebrew's God. How sublime the scene! As they pray, a night vision appears before Daniel's eyes. It is the dream! Do they at once arise? No! They linger on their knees to thank God. Then "Daniel blessed the God of heaven."

There is a stir in the royal palace. We see ushered into the presence of the king, not gray-haired sages, but a Hebrew youth. "Art *thou* able?" says the king. Unawed by the splendor of the scene, the boy tells the forgotten dream, and unfolds its meaning. The great king of Babylon comes down from his throne, falls on his face, and worships Daniel. Oblations and sweet odors are offered to the Hebrew youth. Gifts are showered on him. He is made governor of Babylon. But at his request his three friends were made the governors. Daniel sat in the gate of the king.

2. Nebuchadnezzar's Second Dream. — Thirty

eventful years had passed. Daniel and his friends were in the prime of manhood. The royal arms of Babylon had been crowned with success everywhere. Jerusalem had fallen. Even the fires of her ruins had died away. Her ashes even had cooled with the desolating winds and the flight of years. The Babylonian monarch is well-nigh king of all the world. He has, however, not risen above his troublesome dreams. Again he tells his dream to the sages. He has not forgotten it this time. The sages have lost their wisdom, for now they cannot even interpret a dream that is told them. Daniel is called again. Here is the dream. In the midst of the earth a huge tree. Its top reaches heaven. Its boughs spread over all the earth. It is full of foliage and fruit. A holy voice said, "Hew down the tree. Shake its boughs, and scatter its fruits. Leave the stump to be wet with dew of heaven."

Daniel stands one hour mute before the king; an hour of oppressive silence. Has his heavenly wisdom failed him? Has God forsaken him? He is troubled. Anxiety is deeply carved upon his face. Alas! for Daniel. He has failed at length! No, indeed. He knows the meaning, but he dreads to tell it. Encouraged by the king to speak out, though it be the worst, he tells the hastening doom of Nebuchadnezzar, Babylon's greatest king.

3. Belshazzar's Feast.—Another king now occupies the throne; a king that knows not Daniel, at least cares not for him. Daniel is in the background now. Eventful night! One would hardly suppose that Medes and Persians encompass Babylon with

besieging hosts. The walls are strong and high. The gates are locked, the outer gates. The brilliant palace gleams with unusual brightness. Its gorgeous walls are decked with unusual grandeur. Wealth pours a flood of luxuries through every hall. The king, princes, and noblemen vie with one another in their extravagant display. Costly viands, rarest dainties, and oldest wines allure and entertain the brilliant company. Vessels of surpassing beauty and delicate workmanship adorn the festive board. Many of them are the consecrated vessels of Jehovah's house, that have been brought from desolate Jerusalem. The king lifts a holy vessel to his polluted lips to drink. In an instant his hand is stayed. His eyes stare upon yonder gilded wall. There has blazed forth a hand, moving and writing mysterious characters. The king trembles with fear. The song of revelry ceases. Sages are summoned. But sages cannot read the lines. An old relict of former days gets up, the queen-mother, and tells of Daniel. He is brought from his obscurity. No longer a boy, a man crowned with the honors of the years that have passed over him, he enters. Impressive scene! A trembling king; a calm, untroubled man of God. He reads: "Mene, mene, tekel, upharsin."

Ere the festive gathering breaks up Cyrus and his hosts are within the city walls and thundering at the palace doors. That night was Belshazzar slain. The morrow finds a Mede upon the throne of Babylon. Darius, the uncle of Cyrus, is made monarch of the realm. The government undergoes a

complete revolution, and Daniel is placed next in honor to the king.

IV.—DANIEL THE DEVOUT RULER

Daniel's promotion to such exalted power and glory provoked malignant jealousy. Those who envied him his office, but did not emulate the spotless virtues and exalted excellence which secured it, set themselves about to find some flaw in his life, on which they can base an accusation. They watch his daily acts. They listen to the words he speaks. But no flaw can they discern. Hear their conclusion: "We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God." Amid all the cares of state he was eminently devout. He found time to pray three times every day. An audience with Darius is obtained. A petition is presented to the king. For thirty days let no man ask anything of anyone but thee, O King, on pain of the lions' den. The king is pleased; and it becomes a changeless law.

Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house, opened his window toward Jerusalem, and prayed to Jehovah, kneeling there three times a day. Evil eyes were watching him. He is led from his chamber of prayer to the lions' lair, and hurled into the den to the ravenous beasts. Thus closes a life of glory and renown! Closes? No. In the early morning the sleepless king comes to the den, and removes the rock from its mouth. He peers into its shadows, but sees nothing. Morning has not yet penetrated its lowly, shadowed depths.

He calls "Daniel!" almost afraid of the silence that must ensue. "Daniel.'" From the depths a well-known voice, "O King, live forever!" Lift him out! He stands unhurt before the king. The fasting lions make their morning meal on Daniel's accusers.

V.—DANIEL THE DILIGENT STUDENT OF GOD'S WORD

He found time to pray, and he found time to read the Book of God. Two books seem especially to have engaged his earnest thought—Jeremiah and Isaiah. In Jeremiah there was to him one verse more precious than all the rest: "When seventy years are past, I will visit Israel, and bring them to this land again." He finds that it has been just sixty-eight years since these words were uttered, and his heart is thrilled with hope. What if that father and mother from whom years ago he was ruthlessly torn, and whom he left weeping, have wept their last tears and have died in sorrow for their captive son, still there is a thrill of joy at the thought of the fulfillment of God's word and the exile's return to his native land. Two more years! And then the joy! But when Daniel turns to his other favorite prophet, Isaiah, he reads: "Cyrus, he is my shepherd. He saith to Jerusalem, Thou shall be built, and to the Temple, Thy foundation shall be laid." Jeremiah says the time is at hand for the return. Isaiah says it shall be in the days of Cyrus. Darius is now king. How shall the two be reconciled? Wait on God.

Tidings come from the palace. The royal house

is draped in mourning. Darius is dead. The crown which rested on his brow is placed on Cyrus. Cyrus is king. His inauguration is over. The celebrations have ceased. The king is in his ropal palace. Daniel, over whom had now swept seventy Babylonian winters, approaches the king. Two scrolls are under his arms. He unrolls one. It is Jeremiah. The day of Israel's return has come. He unrolls the other. It is Isaiah. Let the proud king see his name. "Cyrus shall say, Jerusalem be built." These words were written 150 years ago. Cyrus looks. Writes the decree, signs it, seals it. God's word is verified. Exiled Israel is free once more to return to Jerusalem. The shackles have fallen. The fetters are taken off.

Soon from a Higher Court, the Court Supreme, whose decisions are never disobeyed, another edict is promulged. The noble spirit of the aged seer, released from its earthly fetters, is set forever free. The body lies in state; then is laid away. O my Lord, what shall be the end of these things? Go thy way, Daniel, till the end be. For thou shall rest and stand in thy lot at the end of the days.

XIII.

OBADIAH

"Obadiah."—OBADIAH 1.

THE book of Obadiah in its exceeding brevity suggests to us three topics: Obadiah, Edom, Israel. The connection between the three will appear as we proceed. These are the words on which ths short book hinges. Grasp the meaning of these words and the door of this prophetic book swings open, and admits us to behold its truth and beauty. Let us then consider these in their order. Obadiah predicts Edom's doom and Israel's glory.

I.—OBADIAH

The name Obadiah is not unusual in Hebrew records. There are twelve Obadiahs mentioned in the Bible. Efforts have been made to identify this prophet with one or another of the eleven which bear his name. Such efforts have all failed. His is the sole eminence which he enjoys as the author of the book that bears his name. His name means "Servant of Jehovah"; and is exactly equivalent to the familiar Arabic name "Abdallah." By some it has been supposed that Obadiah was originally an Edomite.

Two reasons: Obadiah is the equivalent of Abdallah; and Edomite kings were all denominated Obidas—sounding like Obadiah. It is claimed that he became a proselyte to the Jewish faith, and then fulfilled the Hebrew adage: "The hatchet returned to the forest whence it was hewn"; the proselyte Edomite returned Heaven's judgments upon the forsaken land of his birth. We are not left altogether to surmise, however, in seeking an acquaintance with this "Servant of Jehovah." From the few lines of his book, scanty material indeed, we may gather the following facts:

1. Obadiah Is an Exile Prophet.—While Jeremiah is weeping over desolate Jerusalem, and mingling his tears with the ashes of his beloved city; while Daniel, robed in Babylonish garments, dwells in honor at the Oriental court; while Ezekiel on the banks of Chebar performs his peculiar and distinctive mission, the mission of loving words to weary, waiting exiles—Obadiah suddenly appears, appears among the exiles, utters his short prophecy, then vanishes from sight, and is known no more. For a moment his light blazes up, and blends its rays with the burning, glowing lamp of Ezekiel. For a moment the two exile prophets together shine, like twin stars in the firmament. Then the fleet stranger, latest to come and earliest to go, withdraws his light, disappears, and leaves Ezekiel's prophetic torch, as he found it, in solitary brilliance and grandeur.

2. Obadiah Is the Author of the Shortest Book in the Old Testament.—Shall we say his is the *honor* of writing the shortest book? No; we may not say exactly that. But we may say it is refreshing to find

among the longer books this gem of brevity. Such is its brevity, that its only division is into verses. We must learn not to estimate worth by size. The best books are not always the longest. The best authors are not always those who have published the most books. The best poems are not always those that run through the greatest number of verses. The costliest and most radiant gems are often strung on the shortest thread. The man who suddenly awakes to wealth, but not to learning, may estimate the worth of a library by its size. By his calculation Obadiah's little gem would be of little worth. That which is small may not be valueless. A crystal lens, though very small, may be pure and transparent as the air. Lift it to its place. Adjust it to its fellow lenses. Through the little crystal gate the glories of a distant world disclose their charms. It is small, but through it a world can pour its treasures. Among the larger jewels of God's word this little jewel has its worth. Through it we too shall behold "the vision of Obadiah."

3. Obadiah's Book at First Glance Seems to Be Misplaced in the Bible.—We are ready to believe that the sequence of the Bible books is well ordered. But at first glance it is difficult to say why Obadiah is placed just where it is. Among the prophets it surely ought to be. But it certainly is not in its chronological order. Amos which precedes, and Jonah which follows, are both of a much earlier day than Obadiah. Why, then, is this little gem of a book thrust in between these strangers? When we read the last six verses of Amos we immediately dis-

cern the reason. The last six verses of Amos are the text; the book of Obadiah the brief sermon. Obadiah amplifies Amos' concluding thought. The Exile prophet catches the dying echoes of the herdman prophet's voice, and repeats them in louder, longer tones. It is therefore very natural that his book should immediately follow that of the Tekoan Amos.

4. Obadiah's Mission.—Obadiah's mission was to proclaim the doom of Edom. There were three hostile powers from which Israel suffered most, in the different periods of Israel's national existance: Assyria, Babylon, and Edom. Nahum prophesied against Assyria; Habakkuk against Babylon; Obadiah against Edom. These three prophets may therefore be called foreign missionaries, not, as in this Christian day, laden with messages of love, but in the older dispensation burdened with judgments and hastening doom.

5. Obadiah's Temper.—It is due to this prophet, concerning whom so little is known, to note the one shining quality that brightens the record his pen has made. The man shines through his words. The spirit of the prophet becomes the spirit of his prophecy. The pure water of the fountain becomes tinged with the soil through which it comes. God's word comes to us from a heavenly fountain. But it comes through the personalities of these prophets. And it takes its color from the prophet's heart, temperament, and life. What is the shining quality of Obadiah? Tenderness; pity for a falling foe. He tells the doom of Edom. But he does not exult. As he

sees his proud foe stagger under the weight of divine judgments, and reel and fall, his heart is thrilled with pity; and he says: "Thou shouldest not have provoked Jehovah's wrath." Magnanimous exile! He wears the fetters which Edom helped to forge. He bows beneath the burden which Edom helped to increase. He endures the weight of sorrows, over which Edom clapped her hands and laughed in fiendish joy. But he turns aside to shed a tear of pity, when Edom falls.

II.—EDOM

The second word on which this book of Obadiah hinges is Edom. Through the little crystal lens we catch a glimpse of a dark, portentous cloud, that vents its gathered fury on Edom. See the cloud arise and move onward. Now black and lowering, it rests just over Edom. Ere its lightnings flash, and its thunderbolts fall, we may ask: What about Edom? Edom is a very short word; but a very remarkable one. In its meaning is found the clew to a nation, a nation's residence, and a nation's destiny. Edom means "red." The scarlet line runs through Edom the nation, Edom the country, and Edom the destiny.

1. Edom the Nation.—Who are the Edomites? They are the Esauites. Jacob's name was changed to Israel; and his children were called Israelites. Esau's name was changed to Edom, and his children were called Edomites. A weary hunter came home one day, faint with the chase. His more domestic brother, with no fondness for the forest wilds, but wrapped up in the luxuries of a quiet life, is sodding

pottage. Its appetizing odors reach the exhausted huntsman, and he exclaims, "Feed me with that same red pottage." The other: "Sell me thy birthright." And Jacob took the birthright, and Esau took the red pottage. And Esau was called "Edom,"—"red." That little business transaction fixed the relation of the brothers. It drew a sword between Esau and Jacob. That sword, eager and gleaming, was ever brandished between the Israelites and Edomites. The inheritance went for a mess of pottage. When the pottage was eaten, there was nothing to show for the inheritance. Israel was the gainer; Edom was the loser. Hence Edom always cherished the spirit of revenge.

Onward the ages rolled. What do we see in the desert of Arabia? A host of two millions and more treading the desert sands and climbing Arabia's barren rocks. Who are they, and whither are they bound? The Israelites are marching toward the land of their inheritance, their inheritance bought with a mess of pottage. The host passes. It has neared the borders of the land. But to reach those borders a narrow strip of land must now be crossed. But this narrow strip of land belongs to the Edomites. Will they allow the Israelites to cross? No; the red mess of pottage comes to mind. And they forbid their kindred to cross their borders. And the weary pilgrims, almost in sight of Canaan, turn back, and by a lengthened journey pass around the land of Edom.

Onward rolled the ages. Jerusalem falls before its proud Babylonian hero. Who sends up the loudest,

wildest shout of joy? To whom is Judah's fall the occasion of merriest mirth? Who but Edom, that cried: "Raze it, raze it to the ground." When the poor, frightened, conquered men of Jerusalem fled from the presence of their triumphant foe, and sought to hide themselves in neighboring lands, who sought them, found them, killed them, or delivered them to the conquering foe? Who but Edom? These are the Red Men of Scripture, the Edomites. Among all of Israel's foes none were more avowed, more persistent, more cruel than the Edomites. "In the day that thou stoodest on the other side." The name Edomite has come to designate him who proves false to the ties, not of friendship, but of blood; the man who will sacrifice his kindred for himself. "In the day that thou stoodest on the other side."

2. Edom the Country.—In the singular ordering of Providence the Red Men abide in a red country. Doubly are they men of Edom. Sons of Esau, who was named "Red," they dwell in a country that is best described as the red country. The deep gorge, through which the Jordon flows, and in which the sluggish waters of the Dead Sea lie, continues down through Arabia to the headwaters of the Arabian Sea. It is called "Arabah." The eastern side of this deep rent in the earth is overshadowed by a wall of bristling mountains. Opposite the Jordan this ridge is called Gilead. Opposite the Dead Sea it is called mountains of Moab. The rest of the way southward it is called Mount Seir—that is Mount Bristle. This Mount Seir, this rough backbone country from the southern end of the Dead Sea to

the Arabian Sea, a band twenty miles wide, is the land of Edom. We might spend an hour in speaking of this land of Edom. We have time only to take a hasty glimpse at its greatest wonder, a wonder to which Obadiah refers.

We shall suppose ourselves on the eastern side of this backbone of bristling mountains. Our face is turned westward. We seek some inlet or fissure through which we may pass beyond these mountains of Edom. We cannot climb their steep, frowning sides. Here, almost hidden by the brush and briars, is a narrow valley, shut in by red walls, not high at first, but lifting their heads higher and higher as we proceed. The valley narrows, and by its zigzag course we travel on. A little brook ripples at our feet, and by its music breaks the awful stillness of the place, as it flows in toward the center of the mountain ridge. Oleander flowers bloom upon its banks. The red walls which shut in the valley are festooned with vines and beautiful with varied hues. Presently the valley narrows to twelve feet width, and the walls of red rise to the height of five hundred feet. One feels almost buried. There is the gurgling brook, and the scarlet walls, and the slender band of blue sky overhead. Oppressed by the depths and the loneliness, shall we turn back? No. Heroes have trodden this lowly path. Armies have filed through this deep ravine. Commerce has rolled through this mountain rent. It is even thought that these were the rocks smitten, and this the stream that burst forth, when Moses said, "Shall I bring water out of this rock?" A little farther, and by a sudden turn,

we are released from the imprisonment of towering walls. Almost a fairy scene bursts on the eye. There in the heart of the mountains, there encompassed by towering mountain walls, is a city glorious in its ruins. The silence of death pervades it now. But it is beautiful in death. It is Petra, the rock city, the strong fortress of the Edomites—unlike any other city in the world. Its houses, theaters, monuments are all of solid rock. Its rock is not white like that of Grecian Paros; but it is red, shaded from deepest crimson to the softest blush. Rock, but not reared stone on stone. All is cut out of rock. Each house is one piece of solid stone. Nor is the city a perfect level. The houses rise on ledge after ledge, tier above tier. To one of these buildings there is an ascent of fifteen hundred feet. There it stands far up on the mountain ledge; nor is it alone in its dizzy perch.

This wonderful city of Petra is the stronghold of Edom. Its chief access is by the deep and narrow mountain defile. Well might it boast itself of strength. Now hear Obadiah's words: "The pride of thine heart hath deceived thee, thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rocks, whose habitation is high, that saith in his heart who shall bring me to the ground? Though thou exalt thyself as the eagle, and though thou set thy nests among the stars, thence will I bring thee down, said the Lord." It would seem that the Edomites could hold that fortress against the world. True; but often the lion is caught outside his den.

3. Edom the Destiny.—Not redder the sandstone mountains that overshadowed Petra than the destiny

to which Edom hastened. Isaac to Esau: "By thy sword thou shalt live." War and rapine were Edom's only profession. Edom's history is written in crimson letters; a history of blood. By the bloody sword they captured Mount Seir from the Horites. By the sword they battled with Israel. By the sword they won southern Palestine. By the sword they performed the last act in their long historic drama. Five hundred years after Obadiah saw the cloud gather over Edom, the cloud burst, and showered its destructive contents upon the Edomites. Amid scenes of blood, swords stained with human gore, fratricidal strife, Edom passes from the historic page. And in the grave-like silence of her mountain home we read Obadiah's words: "As thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee. Thy reward shall return upon thine own head." Well aimed this solitary prophetic arrow. The prophet divinely taught springs his mighty bow, lets fly the arrow, and Edom reels and falls.

III.—ISRAEL

The third hinge on which this book turns is the word Israel.

1. The Jews' Favorite Passage in the Prophets.—When the dark cloud of judgment which Obadiah saw overshadowing Edom burst and poured out its fury, and dispersed, the prophet saw a brighter picture, a scene arrayed in all the beauty of a landscape after the storm has passed away. It is far, far away; but it is clearly seen. It is Israel arrayed in robes of peace and singing songs of joy. When

Edom went down, Israel arose. This part of Obadiah's vision is an exquisite cameo of Jewish hope. Into five verses are crowded all the features of Israel's waiting glory. This prophecy has not yet been fulfilled. This picture reveals to the Jew and Christian the bright scenes that are yet to be unrolled in the world's great panorama. We shall not be surprised to learn that Obadiah is one of the favorite books of the Jews. It bids them rest in hope. As the Christian gathers strength from the Master's promises and leans on them, and takes courage from their words of cheer, so the Jew cheers his drooping heart by the last five verses of Obadiah. In his eye this is the golden page of Hebrew prophecy. It is bright with Heaven's promise and Israel's hope. Go to the Jew and ask him, which among all the scenes in the gallery of the prophets most stirs his heart. He will take you not to the grand pictures of Isaiah, or Ezekiel, or Jeremiah. But to the little cameo in the almost hidden book of Obadiah. Look on it. Small, but exquisite. Delicate, but traced with the skill of genius. The minuteness of its lines commands our admiration and enhances its exceeding worth. This picture of Israel's glory is bright, as Edom's doom was dark.

2. *The Bright Scene.*—All we can do is to indicate barely the lines of beauty in this happy scene. A return from captivity. A united people—no longer Judah and Ephraim; but the host of Israel bound by the strong tie of brotherly love. A spreading empire. See how the vision enlarges. A return; a union; an expansion. The Israelites always felt that

their land was small. They were hampered by its contracted borders. There are spots in Palestine from which you can see well-nigh the entire land. Stand on the hills of Samaria. Hermon looms up to view in the north. Gilead's dark outline is seen in the east. Judah's hills roll on the horizon of the south. The waves of the Great Sea form the horizon of the western view. Within those borders lie all of Palestine.

Not so the Palestine of Obadiah's vision. The prophet sees the kingdom growing; expanding in all directions save the west, whose strict limitation is the sea. The southern border sweeps around and takes in Edom; then encompasses all Philistia by the sea. Benjamin is crowded out of his mountain strongholds, and crosses Jordon and occupies Gilead and Bashan in the east. The two and one half tribes that were originally there push out into Ammon and Moab. The tribes of the north push their borders out to Zarephath.

Then mark the word "In Sepharad." In the Dispersion. The scattered Jews shall turn their footsteps toward the Holy Land. The land shall be great, and full, and blessed. There are three historic maps of the Holy Land. Joshua's, a narrow country newly settled; Jeremiah's, a land of broken columns and smoking ruins; Obadiah's, a land of expanded borders and happy people. Then the culminating glory: no earthly king, no material diadem to rest upon a mere human brow—kings were Israel's curse. But saviors, judges: to dispense justice. And the kingdom shall be Jehovah's.

And shall this be? Thank God for the double picture: doomed Edom and illustrious Israel. The fulfillment of the one bids us wait for the sure fulfillment of the other. Call for Edom to-day. She answers not. The caller's voice in vain is wafted over her forsaken cities, and her bare bristling mountains, and down her dark ravines. Every echo whispers to the weary waiting child of God: Not surer Edom's fall than Israel's coming bliss. The pictures are drawn by the same hand. They are inspired by the same Spirit. Then shall Messiah come and reign. The kingdom shall be the Lord's.

"Jesus shall reign where'er the sun
Does his successive journeys run;
His kingdom stretch from shore to shore
Till moons shall wax and wane no more."

XIV

HAGGAI

"Haggai."—HAGGAI 1: 1.

WE are now to visit Haggai. That we may do so to the best advantage, let us address ourselves to two lines of thought. Let us seek an introduction to Haggai the man and Haggai the book; the messenger and the message; the servant and his service; the prophet and his prophecy.

I.—HAGGAI THE MESSENGER

"Then spake Haggai the Lord's messenger." The personal incidents that make up the recorded life of Haggai are absolutely unknown. Around none of the ancient worthies falls there a thicker, more impenetrable veil than that which wraps from our sight and knowledge this honored man of God. Even tradition, so ingeniously inventive in filling up Biblical gaps, is here almost as silent as the inspired Word. While personal incidents are almost wholly wanting, there are certain general facts which serve to bring out into relief the life of this messenger of God. For convenience of apprehension and memory we may arrange those facts under two words—old and new. Haggai the old man with a new mission.

1. Haggai the Aged Prophet.—Unlike Jeremiah, who was called to prophetic work in tender childhood; unlike Ezekiel, upon whom his first vision burst just as he became a man; unlike Hosea, who grew old in the prophetic service—Haggai enters the service in his old age. Already the fires of youth have burnt out. Already whitened locks adorn his brow. Already the vigor of manhood has yielded to the infirmities of multiplied years. Already his life is well-nigh spent. His eye is dimmed, and his natural force abated. He stands before us a relic of a former generation. With trembling footstep he treads the verge of earthly life. Who does not respect old age? Then let us reverently rise before the aged Haggai. Who is he? Is he a prophet? No; not yet. Well, then, he will never be. Whoever heard of a man being called at so late a stage of life? God works upon a plan His own. He who can inspire a boy can surely clothe even great age with fitness for a heavenly work. Born in the land of Judah, driven into dreary exile, hanging his harp on the willows, weeping on the banks of Chebar, dragging out a mournful exile life, returning to his native land, it would seem just there to die and there to be buried. Such was his life. When behold at evening time it became light. A heavenly glow fills the old man's heart. A heavenly inspiration thrills his soul. The word of Jehovah comes by the hand of Haggai.

In perfect harmony with so late a call is the length of Haggai's ministry. It could not be long. We are not left to guess its length. He gives us dates. Who so apt to mention dates as the aged? His

entire ministry falls a little short of four months. It does not even span a year. Grand ministry! Immortal, yet measured by 114 swiftly gliding days! Verily, when God called him to his noble work the lamp of life was burning low. It flickered in its socket, for a moment blazed up with heavenly effulgence, then expired.

In harmony with this brief ministry is the remarkable brevity of his book. No matter how brilliant or useful or grand a work that is crowded into 114 days, its record could not be very long. With the exception of Obadiah, the book of Haggai is the shortest among the prophets. Its brevity speaks volumes. As we tarry with it, it tells us in sharp, quick tones of a great life work crowded into 114 days. The aged Haggai's ideal of the future Jerusalem was the returning glory of old Jerusalem. The glory of the olden day danced before his dim eyes, and the utmost he could say of the future was that it would eclipse the glory of the past.

One more fact we notice in harmony with the prophet's age—the style of Haggai. It is the style of an old man. If it be poetry, it is poetry robbed of youthful glow and graceful drapery. The style is plain. There is not one vision; not one symbol; not one flight of winged fancy. Oft when a youth indulges in a florid style, it is kindly said that time will cull his flowers and trim the wings by which he reaches his flight. That is what time has already done for Haggai. We imagine that we see the aged prophet write with tremulous hand and disdain each proffered flower and fancy, for to him the time is

short. Quick and sharp must be each stroke, lest the death call come, before the work is done. Hence, we have the old man's book, barest of the ornaments of style, but full to overflowing with dates, with common sense, clear-cut duty, and faithful promises. These are the facts which cluster around the word "old": The aged man, the brief ministry, the short book, and the plain words.

2. Haggai's New Mission.—The mission to which the aged Haggai is called is fitly described as new. That is, it is unlike any that has gone before. Let us mark its new features.

The New Name.—Haggai.—It is one of the lonely names of Scripture. In all the range of Hebrew literature there is one Haggai, and only one. So far as we know this Hebrew name has never been reproduced. Like Habakkuk, it stands alone; alone in all the world; alone in all the ages. Yet how beautiful its meaning—"My feast." As if perchance his mother, when she pressed to her heart her tender babe, and could not follow others to the feast at Jerusalem, was satisfied to abide at home with her precious child, and exclaimed "Haggai," "my feast." But when we ask why he is thus called, the veil falls, and shuts him from our view. We know the name and its meaning; that is all.

The New Title.—"The Lord's Messenger."—His is the honor of introducing a new prophetic title. He is "the Lord's messenger." Messenger means angel. Haggai is "the Lord's angel." The glowing prophets of the past have borne many honored titles. But never hitherto are they introduced by the name

"angel." This title heretofore has been reserved to designate a heavenly visitant to this lowly world. Hence, when by divine command Haggai proclaims himself "Jehovah's Angel," there are not wanting the more curious than wise, who would pry beneath the Angel's flowing robe in search of wings, and who announce that he is not a human being, but a heavenly stranger. Such is the fancy of tradition. Here, then, in the person of this aged man is the first angelic prophet. By this we mean not that he shines with cherubic light, or burns with seraphic glow. We mean that while Habakkuk is poetic, and Nahum vivid, and Ezekiel symbolic, and Amos rugged, Haggai is angelic; human indeed, but God's appointed messenger to minister to them who are heirs of salvation.

A New Prophetic Day.—Haggai ushers in a new prophetic day. The whole prophetic period from Jonah to Malachi may be divided into what we shall call four prophetic periods of unequal length. By prophetic period we mean a period of unbroken prophetic light. Before one prophet departs another appears and lifts the blazing lamp of prophecy on high. There are four of these periods. They are separated by three nights, or periods of darkness and silence, wherein no prophet is seen or heard. The first period concluded with the departing glories of Isaiah, Micah, and Nahum. That silence and that darkness are relieved when Zephaniah appears. The second period concludes with the departing glories of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. That darkness and that silence are relieved when Haggai ap-

pears. Like Zephaniah, then, Haggai is the morning star of a new prophetic day. He appears not to prolong the day, but to usher in its breaking dawn. He appears not to catch the blazing lamp of prophecy as it falls from the trembling hand of some aged seer who hastes to his needed rest, but to lift it up from the ground, fill, trim, and kindle it anew. In Haggai we see the gray dawn and the reddening skies and the rising sun that usher in the third prophetic day.

A New National Phase.—Every now and then individuals and nations turn sharp corners in their onward movement. A sudden transformation comes over them, and they are what just now they were not. Haggai appears just in one of these remarkable transformations in Israel's history. What is that transformation? Israel's absolute cure of idolatry. Up to the Exile Israel's blackest sin is idolatry. After the Exile the one brightest quality of that people is freedom from idolatry. Babylon sickened them with idols. Babylon cured them. The burden of the old prophets is "graven images." Not so the new. From the day of Haggai to this day, whatever be the sins of the Jew, he stands in holy horror of an approximation to idolatry. Hard lesson it was for Israel to learn! But it was learned thoroughly, learned in exile. It was learned beside the silent harps; learned through deep grief and heavy sorrows. It was thoroughly learned. With Israel's glories were buried all their graven images. When from the grave of exile Israel once more arose, Israel's idols slumbered on beneath the drifting desert

sands or placid streams of Babylon. Whatever be Israel's sins to-day, of this one she is cured. This is the people who under Sinai's awful brow and amid the impressive scenes of the Arabian mount bowed down before the golden calf and worshiped the work of their own hands. Where dates this wondrous transformation? In Haggai's day. He the first prophet who has no need to speak of graven images.

A New National Name.—There are three names by which this remarkable people have been known—Hebrews, Israelites, Jews. These three names are not indiscriminately used. There are many interesting facts wrapped up in these national names, facts of history, biography, and geography. They serve to divide the history of that people into three periods. Hebrew designates a son of Abraham. Israelite, a son of Israel. Jew, a son of Judah. But the name Jew superseded all the rest. When did it enlarge its compass and take in all the nation? How long have the Israelites been called Jews? Since the days of Haggai. In this sense the aged Haggai is the first Jewish prophet.

II.—THE MESSAGE

In his brief ministry Haggai delivers four short incisive messages.

1. Divine Reproof.—The aged prophet stands in the court of the unfinished Temple. Jerusalem is just rising out of her ashes. Haggai looks around. A busy scene meets his eye on every side. Splendid mansions adorn the hill crests of the city. The

valleys resound with the noise of the workman. The music of the hammer and the axe and the chisel echo to each other over the hills. Great blocks of granite are slowly hauled through the streets to lay the foundation of some rich man's house. Ceiled walls adorn the apartments where private opulence and luxury invite repose. It is a busy scene. But tears roll down the furrowed cheeks of the aged seer, as he looks around upon the unfinished house of God. Sorrow fills his heart. Not a workman is busy there. The host of artisans that began this house of God have been called off to finish the palace on Zion, that lordly mansion on Acra, or that abode of wealth on Bezetha. Private wealth rejoices in its comforts. God's house is still a scene of desolation. Wrapped in his saddening thoughts, the prophet at last resolves to solve this strange problem.

With him we plunge into the busy scene, and amid the din of work, or the luxury of wealth, we pause. We enter the lordly mansion, and ask its owner, Why is this? Why build your house and leave God's house desolate? Now listen to his answer. The answer is that the captivity was to last seventy years, and it is only sixty-eight years now. They have such respect for God's Word that they would not for the world build the Temple before the time! Prophecy is their guide! It is their piety that restrains them! The prophet knits his brow and answers. Two answers the prophet gives. If it was not time to build God's house, was it time to build their own? If it was not time to return from exile, ought they not to have remained in exile till the time had come?

Is it piety that restrains them from building yonder house of God, but lets them live in their costly dwellings in anticipation of the prophetic day? But about the prophetic time, the time has come. Haggai can show that the seventy years have expired, and it is time to build Jehovah's house.

Well, now what do they say to that? They have a ready answer. They shift their position. They admit they ought to build, but the times are dreadfully hard. And it is true. It was indeed a hard time with those poor Jews. The fields were burnt almost to a crisp. They sowed much and gathered little. The sun would scorch and the clouds would not gather. Somehow there was a curse on their industry. Money too would slip away. It was as if their purses had holes in them. A man received his money, and could not tell what became of it. The people never felt poorer than when they looked over on the unfinished walls of Jehovah's house.

2. Divine Remedy.—Haggai prescribes a remedy for hard times; a remedy that will bring rain, will fertilize the soil, will mend the holes in their old purses, cover their fields with waving grain, fill their barns, cheer their hearts—a panacea for all the evils of hard times. God controls the dew; God controls the drought, God manages the clouds, and God commands the rain. "Build my house," saith Jehovah. Go, hew down the forest tree; and cut out the mountain granite; and build the desolate house of God; and see what God will do.

They resolved to follow Haggai's advice. But they did not without murmuring. Certain it was that

many doubted. Working with all their power, and all their time, they can barely keep their families from want. What will become of them if they give part of their time to God's work? Trust God, and see. This they did. God gives the dew and the shower, and the health and vigor. When they put their money in the purse it stays there. At the end of the year they have served God, and God has served them. "From this day I will bless you."

3. Divine Explanation.—What connection is there between building God's house and the harvest and the purse? There it is where many stumble and fall. Many are ready to say that it all sounds well enough, but while others trust they themselves will take the plow and the hoe, and the hard hands and the health. These are their trust. That is just what troubled the Jews. Hence Haggai explains the connection. The prophet is speaking to a priest. "If a man wears a clean robe, and the robe touches bread or pottage or wine or meat, does the clean garment make that which it touches clean?" Priest: "No." Haggai: "If a person has touched a dead body, and is therefore unclean, does he by Jewish law make unclean whatever he touches?" Priest: "Yes." Holiness is not imparted, but sin is. A man may be full of energy, and work with unremitting zeal. But all the beauty of these shining qualities is marred by the touch of his unclean heart. His heart cherishes disobedience to God. The beauty of his life does not cleanse his heart; but his unclean heart impairs his noble work. Get right with God; and God will right all things besides.

4. Divine Encouragement.—Inspired by the words of Haggai, the Jews built God's house. But some of the people are weeping over it. Weeping? Why? It is the old men that are weeping. The young men shout, as they see the walls rise. And the old men weep. It is hard to tell which is louder, the shouting or the weeping. But why do they weep? Their memory is at work. In days long ago they have looked on Solomon's temple. They have seen its glory; a glory undimmed, but rather burnished, by the retrospect. This temple is so plain and small, they weep as they remember the superior glory of the old temple. Who is so well suited to cheer them as an aged seer, who himself had seen the former house? If a young man should speak, they would say that he had never seen Solomon's temple, or he too would weep. Haggai tells them: "The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former." How can that ever be? See what it lacked—the sacred fire, the Shekinah, the Ark of the Covenant, the Cherubim, the Urim and Thummim. Surely its glory then was far inferior to Solomon's.

Now here is a very plain prophecy: "The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former." There is no difficulty in understanding those simple words. Now here are certain facts: It was not more glorious at first, or the old men would not have wept over it. The second temple no longer stands. It cannot in the future become more glorious, because it does not exist. Now either this prophecy has been fulfilled or it has failed, and henceforth can never be fulfilled. Which shall we say? Failed?

Then the whole structure of the Word comes down to the level of man. And man is at sea without a chart, drifting toward the hidden rocks. No; but it has not failed. It has been gloriously fulfilled. The glory shall be greater; for in this place will I give "Shiloh."

Onward the ages roll. Sweet music breaks on the ear. It rolls from the clouds over the hills of Bethlehem. Hear the song: "Glory to God in the highest; Shiloh on earth; good will to men." Come to the temple. Crowds are pouring in and out. Among them a Babe is brought to the house of God. Who is it? Simeon tells us: "Now, Lord, lettest thou thy servant depart in peace [in Shiloh]. The peace has come, according to thy word." Honored pavement! More honored than all the mosaic work of the former house, because honored by the presence of Messiah, and trodden by His sacred feet. Honored walls, more honored than all the gold of the former house, because resounding to Messiah's voice. Honored shrine, more honored than that in which Shekinah gleamed, because in its sacred courts is seen the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of His person. Honored, because to it Messiah came. Then, as if it could bear nothing more, as if it were surcharged with glory; when Messiah breathed out His life on Calvary, the embroidered veil that hung before the Sacred Shrine was rent in twain, and the glory of this latter house departed with its Lord. Its massive foundation stones were quickly overturned, and its court was desolated by the ripping plow.

XV

ZECHARIAH

"Zechariah."—ZECHARIAH 1: 1.

ZECHARIAH is a harsh and angular name. Judged by its sound it might be condemned. But it is a rough vestment that robes a beautiful thought. While its rugged accent grates upon the ear, its softer, sweeter meaning takes hold upon the heart. Zechariah means Jehovah's Memorial. God does not forget. Divine remembrance is written in the prophet's name. Where was he born? In exile. Where did he receive his name? In exile. What shall be his name? There he is a tender babe. About him are the silent harps. There are exile tears and burdened spirits. Shall he be called Ichabod? No. Amid the shadows of desolation in one heart at least there was the light of hope. Pointing to the bright future, the parent said: "God will remember." So let the child be called Zechariah. The prophet's name tells us, therefore, of parental piety unsubmerged by floods of exile sorrows; of Israel's hope undimmed by surrounding, deepening gloom; of the young child's destiny, in whom should be most illustriously proved Jehovah's remembrance. So much for his significant name.

Zechariah is like Hosea in the obscurity that wraps his prophecy. Zechariah is like Daniel in the prevalence of visions as the method of his inspiration and the frequent trace of Oriental imagery. Zechariah is like Ezekiel in the marked and diverse peculiarities of his style, raising the question in both instances whether one man could have written a book in which there are such diversities of style. Zechariah is like Isaiah in the occasional clear portraiture of gospel days, causing these two prophets to be more frequently quoted in New Testament than any others.

Now for the man himself. His book presents him in three aspects. It gives us three glimpses of the man. On these pictures of prophetic life we now shall look.

I.—ZECHARIAH THE DREAMER

He is now a young man. The angel calls him a young man. His grandfather Iddo was then living. Hence he must have been young. He writes in a young man's style. His pen is aglow with the ardor of his thoughts. Unlike Haggai, he pictures future bliss, not as the past rekindled, rebeautified, but as the development of the present. To the mind of age, the past is the bud of which the future is the flower. To the mind of youth the present is the blossom, the future is the fruit. This is just the difference between Haggai and Zechariah.

The shadows of night gather around Jerusalem. The sun has set behind the sea. The golden lines of light have faded into purple. The purple is now lost

in the darker bands of night. The din of work is hushed. The artisans have gone home to rest. One by one the feeble lights of the city die out. Jerusalem is wrapped in silence and in darkness. We enter yonder dwelling, where Zechariah lives. We enter his chamber. He has gone to rest. The young man sleeps. What a night this shall be to him! A night of unrest! Nine dreams in one night are surely enough to break his rest. Was there ever such a night of dreamy visions? These dreams are all linked into one another, and tend to one great purpose. As men travel much faster in thought by night than on foot by day, we must be prepared, if we follow Zechariah, to be whirled back and forth between Jerusalem and Babylon in a single night. Only let us not forget, we belong to Jerusalem. Now for a hasty glance at this regiment of dreams.

1. Among the Myrtle Trees.—It is in a lovely vale, where night seems all the darker. Under the myrtle trees, whose low branches and thick foliage deepen even the darkness of the vale, we stand. Was there ever darker night, or scene more weird? A distant noise is heard. Nearer and nearer it comes. It is the sound of horses' hoofs, rattling over the hills, and echoing through the night air. There they come. The rider seated on a red horse reins up his steed just where we are beneath the myrtle trees. There are other horses with him. The rider speaks: "We have ridden through the earth; and all the earth is at rest." Another voice: "Not all. All but Jerusalem. Lord, when wilt thou bless Jerusalem?" A higher voice: "The Lord shall comfort Zion and

choose Jerusalem." And then an angel whispers to Zechariah: "Go; carry that message to Jerusalem." The vision vanished.

2. Four Horns and Four Artisans.—Again the spirit of dreams comes over the young man. What does he see? Four huge, rough horns obtrude themselves in threatening attitude on the young man's vision. He cries out: "What are these?" These are the horns which have scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem. A horn represents resistless power. But what else is that we see? There come four carpenters; one comes to each horn, and beats it and hammers it away, until all the horns have disappeared. For every one of Jerusalem's enemies God provides a master workman to beat it down. Judah's rest shall come. The first step toward it shall be the beating down of Judah's foes.

3. The Measuring Line.—Dreaming prophet, what dost thou now see? A man with a measuring line in his hand. Which way is he going? To Jerusalem, to measure its length and breadth. Why? Have not those walls been measured often? Walls? Why, the city has outgrown her walls. Since the carpenters destroyed the horns that gored Jerusalem, since the enmies have been destroyed, the old city has outgrown her walls. Her only wall now is the Lord, who is a wall of fire roundabout her. Her long-absent people are returning, and are covering the hills with their multitude. The man with the measuring line must haste to measure the city. He hastens with his measuring line out of sight. Zechariah awakes again from dreams of the night.

4. A Trial.—The judge is the angel of the Lord. The accused is Joshua the high priest. He is clothed in filthy garments; not the pure white robes of the high priest's office; not in gorgeous apparel, like Aaron. But soiled and filthy are his garments. He stands before Jehovah as the accused. Who is the accuser? Satan at his right hand. Here is the first presence of Satan in the prophecies. The better the work that goes on, the quicker his appearance. But with all his shrewdness and sophistry and eloquence he cannot make a good case. He has done his utmost. Yet he must stand by and see his accused acquitted and honored. The filthy robes are taken off, and pure and fine and suitable robes are put on him. A fair miter rests upon the high priest's head. Not only is an enlarged city pictured, but in the white turban that adorns the high priest's head is given the assurance of a renewed worship according to Mosaic law.

5. Olive Trees.—A golden chandelier brightly burning sheds its radiance all around. An olive tree is on the right of it, and an olive tree is on the left of it. What means all this? Zechariah is immediately informed about the chandelier. That represents the House of God: a light in a dark place. But what are those olive trees? Knowest thou not what they are? Those olive trees on the right and left of the chandelier? Those olive trees have pipes connecting them with the chandelier. Through those pipes the oil is conveyed to the lamp. It burns on. No hand feeds it. The olive tree bears its fruit and conveys its oil to the lamp. What does it mean?

God will take care of His church. The House shall be built. The oil shall not fail.

6. A Flying Roll.—A huge scroll, thirty by fifteen feet, is lifted up overhead. It has writing on it on both sides. On one side is written in large letters a curse against all thieves. On the other is written a curse against all perjurers, against all dishonesty and falsehood. Oh, what sweeping sins these are! Thefts and lies are the plunderers that follow in the wake of all mighty revolutions. It was so in Zechariah's day. All foes were utterly confounded except those found within the city's walls. A great city; renewed worship; a new temple. But a dishonest and lying people. Now a striking peculiarity of this flying roll is that wherever a thief or liar lives, let him look out, for thither the roll is sure to come. See, it lowers and enters yonder house. There it stays until it has burned it up, the timbers and the stones. What a sensation would it produce in this city and in this day! How many houses would be left standing, after the fiery roll had passed from our skies away? But it was a dream.

7. The Ephah.—An Ephah is a dry measure. What is that in it? Why, a woman. Rather small accommodation it is for a journey. All the smaller because of the deceitfulness of the defective measure. The woman represents idolatry. A heavy piece of lead is put upon her, that she may not escape. On wings of the wind she is borne to Babylon, the land of idolatry. There shall be no more graven images in God's house.

8. Four Chariots.—Two mountains of brass.

Forth from them roll four chariots. We mark them by the different colors of their horses. One has red horses; another black; another white; the other piebald. The charioteers guide their steeds in different directions. The black, north toward Babylon; the white, after them to Persia; the piebald, south to Egypt; the red, every way throughout the earth to Rome. Those that went north have already accomplished their mission, while the prophet gazes on the scene. The piebald horses since that time have faithfully done their work. The red horses are yet running up and down in the earth. When reeling Rome shall fall, their long and tiresome task will be accomplished.

9. A Coronation.—As the morning began to break in the skies, and this long, restless, dreaming night began to wear away, with its passing shadows come a last vision and command. The prophet arises from his bed and hastens to execute the heavenly command. With three friends he goes to Josiah's house. Now Josiah had much silver and gold, which he had brought from Babylon. The prophet and his friends take the silver and the gold. They make two crowns, and set them on the high priest's head. Then place them in the Temple as a memorial. Memorial of what? Look on those crowns and learn their lesson. The Jews shall come from far and worship in Jehovah's house. Nor Jews only. The crowns were made of the silver and the gold. They that are far off shall come. Jew and Gentile shall join in worship. As Joshua wore the silver and the gold, so shall his greater Lord. Jew and

Gentile hands shall wreathe the garland that adorns His majestic brow.

"Let every kindred, every tribe
On this terrestrial ball
To Him all majesty ascribe,
And crown Him Lord of al."

II.—ZECHARIAH THE TEACHER

In Zechariah's life we have not only dreams by night, but lessons by day. He can soar with angel wings in the regions of fancy, and revel in celestial visions, until we are weary in watching his lofty flight. Then he can come down from the clouds, and sit beside us, and discourse with practical wisdom on the every-day duties of life. He is pre-eminently a versatile prophet. He can dream with the dreamiest; and can watch with the most watchful. At one moment his thoughts appear robed in the Babylonish garments of Oriental imagery. At another moment they are simply wrapped in the peasant's plain and common garb.

Two years pass after the wonderful night of dreams. Zechariah once more appears. It is a day scene. The din of industry is heard throughout the city. Jerusalem is alive with the music of the workman's tools. A small caravan has just arrived from Babylon. Many of the Jews when in Babylon, informed that they could return to Judah, were satisfied to know that they could return, and chose to remain in the land of exile. Ever and anon tidings were borne back and forth between Babylon and

Jerusalem. In those days when there were no telegraph wires, no telephones, and no railroad trains, and no stage coaches, and no post riders, and no regular mails, the arrival in Jerusalem of a caravan from Babylon would create no small stir in the city to learn the news from the land where seventy years of exile had been spent, and where many kindred and many friends still dwelt. Letters there doubtless were, and messages.

But in the caravan two men appear, sent on a special mission. What can it be? They ask for Zechariah. They have come to see him. They have come to obtain his advice. The business they would transact is in their judgment so important, it could not safely be committed to writing, but demands a personal commission. So important it seems that these men have left their homes, quit their business, and journeyed over desert sands, wild mountains, and broad rivers. Surely now it must be some great business, of very general interest, affecting the very existence or the highest welfare of the Jewish people. The time and place are appointed in which to meet the prophet. The commissioners from Babylon lay before Zechariah the weighty question: "Should I weep in the fifth month?"

In the fifth month Jerusalem had fallen. During all the seventy years of exile the exile Jews had mourned and fasted on the anniversary of their city's fall. On the tenth day of every fifth month of the year they wept as they remembered Zion. Oh, how they wept! But when the fetters of captivity were broken, and they were invited to go back to the city over whose

loss they had so bitterly and often wept, many of them clung to the land of Babylon. The fifth month is coming. Shall we weep or not? We can do either. If it is necessary, we can weep. If it is necessary, we can seal the fountain of our tears. Accommodating sorrow! We shall send men to Jerusalem to learn whether to release or to restrain our tears. Speed, ye messengers, lest the fifth month come, and we know not whether to weep or not.

The case is laid before Zechariah. Can he who soars amid clouds, and talks to angels, come down to a flat, square question like this? The difficulties of the case are these. It does not seem right to weep over a city after the city has arisen from its ashes. On the other hand, it does not seem just the thing to forbid tears, when so much sin yet prevails. Again, it seems a matter of small consequence whether those Babylonish Jews fast or not, since they disregarded the permission to come back to Jerusalem.

Hear now the beautiful answer which Zechariah gives to their strange question: "The Lord has returned to Zion, and dwells in the midst of Jerusalem. The aged safely walk the streets of Jerusalem, leaning on their staves for the multitude of days. Boys and girls play about the streets in innocent amusement. The foundation of the Lord's house is laid. The Temple walls are rising. The vine yields her fruit. The ground gives her increase. The heavens give their dew. Let your fasts become glad and cheerful feasts. Come back; and let us execute the judgment of peace and truth in all our gates."

III.—ZECHARIAH THE SEER

Here we have glimpses of the future. Some years at least, we know not how many, have passed, since the prophet gave his lesson about the fast. Perhaps he is now in the prime of life. May be he is verging on the borders of old age. Of one thing, however, we are quite sure. In his writing we discern none of the infirmities of age. Three styles mark the three eras of Zechariah's life, or the three missions which he performs. As a dreamer his style is lofty. We watch him in his dizzy soaring far, far above our heads. He holds converse with angels, and seems to disdain the touch of earth. He wearies us, as he soars with his unwearied wings. As a teacher, he is plain, practical, an elder brother, with whom we may converse, and from whom we may receive instruction. As the seer he is different from both. His style is smooth, flowing, and beautiful. He is neither above us, nor yet sits down with us, but takes our hands and leads us up to the contemplation of the greater themes. There are in all the Bible no more elevating words than those which flow from the swiftly gliding pen of Zechariah, Judah's gifted seer. The object of his first mission was to encourage the Jews to build the Temple. His second to set right the Babylonish Jews. His third, to give an apocalyptic vision of the history of the Jewish race. The last six chapters of Zechariah form a vista, through which we are invited to look; along which are in quick succession to be seen the leading features of Jewish history from

that day till the end of time. Farther and farther the vision stretches, till in the hazy distance the view is caught from earth and wrapped in the clouds of heaven. All these prophetic views cannot be presented here. Some of these visions furnish good material wherewith to construct a bridge across the wide chasm that separates the Old Testament and the New. Two of these scenes in the vista may engage our attention now. In Zechariah's day both were future. In our day, one is past. The other is still approaching. How near we cannot say. Fix our gaze on the last two objects in this vista.

1. A Flock of Sheep is seen grazing on the wooded hills and green meadows. On yonder mountains an enemy appears, ready to descend upon the helpless flock. But ere he comes down, behold, a mighty shepherd rises to defend the sheep. He is armed. But how? With two shepherd's crooks. They are named: Beauty and Bands. With them his strong arm is able to ward off and destroy the threatening foe. He calls upon the flock to follow him. But they will not. He throws up his office. He takes Beauty, and breaks it, and throws it away. If they would not have him for their shepherd, he would not be their shepherd. What is it we see? Why, as the wages of his service, thirty pieces of silver are brought, and cast down in the house of Jehovah. Beauty was broken; the covenant between the shepherd and the sheep was broken. What is the shepherd now doing? He takes the other crook—Bands—and breaks it and throws it away. The sheep scatter. Sheep usually all go one way. Bands

represents that union. But when Bands was broken, the sheep scattered.

Hark! A voice: "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd." The instrument of death descends, and the smitten shepherd falls.

We have seen this in the distance. Now let us hasten to the scene. We hasten through five hundred years. Listen: "I am the Good Shepherd." "We will not have this man to reign over us." Beauty is broken. "And Judas brought the thirty pieces of silver and cast them down in the Temple." "I lay down my life for the sheep." "And they came to Jesus, and found that he was already dead." Bands was broken. Union was destroyed. When Jerusalem fell again, and Titus, the triumphant Roman warrior, looked upon its strongholds he said, "This city could never have been taken but for internal strife and jealousies." In other words, it could never have been taken had not Bands been broken. Magnificent fulfillment! And yet we are sometimes told Jesus is not He concerning whom the Hebrew poets sang, and around whom clustered the scenes of prophetic visions! Let us adopt the language of the Roman heathen, "Truly, this was the Son of God."

2. The Last Picture in the Prophetic View.—This is still future. Each of the others has been accomplished. Shall not the last? Look on it. He cometh. Down from the skies He comes. His feet touch the heights of Olivet. In an instant the earth trembles. The mountain cleaves in two. The tremendous rent in the earth reaches to Azal or Ascalon

on the Great Sea. The waters of the Mediterranean rush wildly through, course by Jerusalem, wash away the slime of the Dead Sea, and course on through the sand drifts of the Arabah, down to the Southern Sea. The land is fertilized. Messiah takes His seat upon the throne. Jerusalem becomes the great world center. All nations come to worship at Jehovah's shrine. They keep one feast only. The feast of Tabernacles. Why? Passover was fulfilled when Jesus died. Pentecost was fulfilled when the Holy Ghost came down. Tabernacles is unfulfilled. It is the feast of joy. It was the feast in which Jesus made his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, as a pledge that He would come to reign. Glorious Feast of Ingathering! The seed time of tears has issued in the harvest of joy. The Jew and the Gentile, so long separated, so long at war, so irreconcilable, shall sit down at one feast, together shout "Hosanna," and praise the Lord. If the Gentile say, "We loved him first," the Jew can then respond "If last, yet not the least."

"From sorrow, toil, and pain,
And sin, we shall be free;
And perfect love and friendship reign
Through all eternity."

XVI

MALACHI

"Malachi."—MALACHI 1: 1.

MALACHI is the last of the Hebrew bards. He is the last in the long and noble line of Israel's gifted seers. In his hand the bright prophetic lamp expired. All that may be known about this prophet may be, for convenience, arranged around the letter R. Four R's will marshal all these facts. Let us consider them.

I.—MALACHI THE REAL

A real man and a real name. He is the only one of these prophets whose existence has been questioned. All admit that Jeremiah and Daniel as truly lived in the past as we live in the present. In reference to Isaiah, Ezekiel, Zechariah, not only do all admit that they really lived, but it has been maintained that they lived twice, or rather that there were two Isaiahs, two Ezekiels, and two Zechariahs,—that there was in each a twofold reality. But when we come to Malachi, we find that it has been questioned whether this is a real name, or whether it represents a real man. About Malachi, therefore, you will find three theories.

1. An Incarnate Angel.—He is not a real man,

but an angel in the form of man. Malachi is the Hebrew word for "angel." Rigidly rendered it would be "My angel." The introduction of the book would be "The burden of the word of the Lord to Israel by His angel.' The Septuagint so renders it. Here is seen one of the ambiguities of the Hebrew language. There would be no difficulty in settling this question in English. Proper names in English begin with capital letters. Not so in Hebrew. In Hebrew, Malachi has a small initial "m." There is then nothing in the form of the word which can settle the question. Hence, there have been those who affirm that this last of the prophets is the angel of the Lord; not a man, but a celestial visitant, clothed with a divine commission, and laden with a heavenly message.

2. A Real Man, but Not a Real Name.—Some unknown person with an official designation. Take the word angel in its less restricted meaning "messenger.' "The word of the Lord by the hand of His messenger." In other words, by this theory it is maintained that the Book of Malachi is anonymous. Its author, a real and perhaps eminent man, who for some reason chooses to withhold his name, and simply to designate his office and mission—Jehovah's messenger. This view has able advocates. Two questions naturally spring up right here—namely, What reason was there for the concealment of his real name; a deviation from the universal practice of these prophets? No plausible reason has been assigned. In this failure is seen the weakness of this view. The other question: Who was the

probable writer of this book, if it be anonymous, and if Malachi be not a proper name? Here a variety of answers has been given. In fact, it is just such questions as this that Rabbinical writers love to answer. Here their inventive genius finds a spacious field. Some say it is Zerubbabel, who rebuilt the Temple. Some Nehemiah, who rebuilt Jerusalem and governed the land. Some, Ezra, the mighty scribe, who perhaps gathered the canonical books together in their present form. And some say it is Mordecai the Jew, who bowed not the knee before Haman the Magnificent.

3. A Real Man and His Real Name.—This certainly seems the most natural view. If the book is angelic in its agency, it is exceptional. If it is anonymous, it is exceptional. Unless in advance there is presented some reason for its being a deviation from the general rule, it is most natural to regard its introductory verse in the same light in which we have regarded the other prophets. We regard him as a man whose recognized name was Malachi. Malachi as a boy, Malachi as a man, and Malachi as a prophet. All the Hebrew names mean something. If we go behind the name in one case after its meaning, we must be consistent to go behind in every case, and the result will be we shall make every book in the Bible anonymous. We shall have a history without a person in it. We shall have a book of chronicles which, instead of being a list of names, will be a collection of impersonal titles. We believe that we have a real man and his real name. It is enough for us to know that the book was

written by someone. By whatever name he was then called, and by whatever work he had then become eminent, he who received the inspiration, and penned these words that have come down to us over all the ages, is known among us as Malachi. So much for the first R, the reality of the man and name.

II.—MALACHI THE REASONER

The book is brief, but in its brevity possesses and reveals a strong individuality. Now let us see what this individuality is. What can we learn of Malachi from the style and method of his book? We may not write his name down in the list of great Hebrew poets. It is doubtful whether he wields the poetic pen at all. If this be poetry, then it is poetry in decay. There is in Malachi none of the grandeur of Isaiah, none of the persuasive measures of Jeremiah, none of the rapture of Ezekiel, none of the sublimity of Habakkuk. If this be poetry, we may lament Judah's sad decline. Her golden age of literature has passed. She has soared her highest, and now on wearied wings seems coming down from her lofty flights. No one can ever place Malachi beside Isaiah in the music of his language, in the richness of his fancy, in the charm of his style, in the beauties of his imagery.

We may not write his name among the great orators of the land. There is a rugged eloquence about the herdman Amos, that sways the crowd, and steals their hearts against their will; a native power of speech that holds spellbound his audience,

and charms their ears and fascinates their eyes, even while he pronounces Heaven's judgments on them. There is nothing like that in Malachi. He is no orator.

We may not write his name among the great actors of the land. Ezekiel was an actor. The movement of his hand, feet, eyes, often spoke more prophecy than his words. Not an act of Malachi has come down to us.

Then what is his individuality? He is a mighty reasoner. If his be not the inspiration of poetry, eloquence, or action, it is the inspiration of logic. He wields the sledge-hammer of argument. We do not mean to say that he is a greater reasoner than any other prophet; but that reasoning is his forte. In the domain of logic he is at home.

His style is smooth and calm and clear. Not an impulse, not an impassioned thought, occurs to ripple the smooth surface of the great argument. Not a dark sentence, not a complicated or involved period, mars the clear beauty of the logician's inspired reasoning. In Malachi the heart is subordinate to the head. The ebulition of feeling is kept under, that reason may assert her rights. Hence, there is less of doubt and less of controversy about what Malachi means than perhaps about any other prophet. Hosea is dark because fervid. Malachi is clear because calm. Whatever of ornate beauty of style he sacrifices, the sacrifice is made at the shrine of reason.

Malachi has a formula on which he invariably frames his argument. As he is in search, not of

variety, but of clearness and precision, he does not mind using it over and over again. He states a truth in a sentence, simple, plain, short. Then he introduces a skeptical objection to it, as urged by the skeptics of his day. Then he refutes the objection and confirms the original truth. Note some of these arguments.

Statement: I have loved you, saith the Lord. Objection: Wherein hast thou loved us? Refutation: Esau and Jacob were brothers. Look at Esau's sons, the Edomites; their bare, bleak mountains; their sand-drifts of Arabah. See them trying to build, yet God casting them down. Read their names, "The people against whom the Lord hath indignation forever." Then look upon your own green hills, and prospering city. Has not God loved you? Look not on what you wish, but on what you have, which others have not, though they are not worse than you. Then answer: Does not God love you? Simple, plain, but unanswerable argument!

Again, Statement: If I be a father, where is mine honor, O priests that despise my name, and offer polluted breath upon mine altar? Objection: Wherein have we dispised thy name, and polluted thee? Refutation: Take the offering which ye bring to me, and carry it to your governor, and hear what he will say. The law demanded offerings that were without blemish. See, they have brought to God the blind, the lame, the diseased, the sick. When a man found in his flock a lamb that had some defect, which therefore he would loathe to eat, and would not suffer to come on his table, he would

bring it and lay it on God's altar. Yet he would say, Wherein have we despised his name? Go offer it to your governor, and see what he will do. Cursed be the deceiver, which hath in his flock a male, and voweth and sacrificeth unto the Lord a corrupt thing; for I am a great King, saith the Lord.

Statement: Ye have wearied the Lord with your words. Objection: Wherein have we wearied him? Refutation: When ye said, that God is not a God of judgment, and that God delighted in the evil-doer. Every fault found with God is chronicled in the book of divine remembrance. With them God is weary.

Statement: Ye have robbed me. Objection: Wherein have we robbed thee? Refutation: In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed, because ye have robbed me. Will ye have the curse removed? Then bring in the tithes. Fill my storehouse, and I will fill yours. Prove me and see.

Statement: Your words have been stout against me. Objection: What have we spoken so much against thee? Refutation: Ye said, It is vain to serve God. Yet see: "Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name.

"And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.

"Then shall ye return, and discern between the

righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not."

How admirably suited is this prophet to his work! It was a peculiar people, to whom he was called to preach. They had reached that state in which all the thunders of reproof would have been unavailing to move them. All appeals to their conscience would have been powerless to quicken their moral sense. They were impervious to exhortation. But quickly the great reasoner gathers the coils of logic around them, and brings them in, bound hands and feet. He lets them object. He heads them here and there. Till at last, finding no escape, they must yield, and acknowledge that he is right. Malachi is the most Socratic of all the Hebrew prophets. It is worth our while to note that while he wields the logician's scepter in Jerusalem, and is convincing men of truth against their wills, Socrates sits in the market-place of Athens, and by his earnest questions is seeking to lead men to a clearer vision of the truth.

Look not in Malachi for metaphor; there is none. Look not for rhetorical flourish; there is none. Look not for imaginative flight; there is none. Look for solid argument, strong reasoning, clear statement, ringing questions that lead to truth, open gateways to startling facts, we shall find them not wanting. The thread of reason strings all his thoughts, and binds in beautiful unity all his prophetic words.

III.—MALACHI THE REFORMER

There is a sure tendency in everything good in

this world to run down. Hence, to prevent the utter ruin of the world and the prevalence of evil, and to correct this tendency, the history of the world is marked by great reformations. Affairs get worse and worse, till they cannot be endured. Then comes a reformation. This degenerates gradually, until its evils are corrected by another reformation. So the work goes on, in endless succession. Hence, one prominent class of earth's heroes is its great reformers. To this class Malachi belongs. Note the following facts:

1. A Cluster of Reformers.—We have had occasion before to observe that heroes come in clusters. Often there is a dearth of them. Sometimes an age has no truly great hero, to whom with pride the people can point, to whom they can confidently look for safe, wise, guidance. Then comes an age in which heroes are multiplied. The age in which Malachi lived, and conducted his reformatory work, surely is eminent for its great reformers. Malachi sheds the light of truth in Jerusalem. If Zoroaster was not then living in Persia, at least his religion received a new impulse, which brought the name of Zoroaster once more out of the shadows into the light. Look to China. Confucius is disentangling his people from many of their degrading errors, and evolving his system of Chinese reformation. Look to India. Buddha is just emerging from obscurity, and seeking to rescue his people from their horrid vices, and initiates the great Indian reformation. Turn to the West. Socrates is trying hard to enlighten and to lift to higher thought and better life

the people of historic Greece. The Greek reformer drank of the fatal hemlock, but the truth he taught lived on, and bore its precious fruit in happier, better days. Contemporaneous with the Indian, Chinese, Persian, and Grecian reformations is the Judean reformation under Malachi.

2. The Errors Against Which These Reformatory Efforts Are Directed.—What was the special occasion of this reformation? Irreligion. The prevalence of a spirit of indifference about any and all religion. There seem to be three stages of religious history in every period of time: True religion, false religion, no religion. The first great contest of truth was against false religion. The battle was against idol-worship. Long the battle raged. Idols were hidden in the people's clothes, kept in the people's houses, reared in the streets, worshiped in the Temple, erected in high places. At last at Babylon Israel's idolatry is conquered. The people come home to Jerusalem. They brought no idols with them. They erected no idols there. They would not any more bow down to graven images. But irreligion rears its head among them. They would not bow down to idols, nor to God. Upon the ruins of idolatry infidelity, skepticism, rationalism erect their altars to the unknown God. Throughout the book of Malachi there is reference to these views: no providence, no inherent evil, no judgment, no use in religion, no profit in prayer.

3. Reformers.—Three good men upon the scene. The frequent recurrence of trios, or the number three, in these prophetic ages is worthy of notice.

We may not know what lessons are thus conveyed. But the recurrence, to say the least, is remarkable and interesting. Three heroes appear to guide the drifting ship of state from the vortex of infidelity. They occupy three separate spheres; yet they are indissolubly linked. Zerubbabel and Joshua, Haggai and Zechariah, have died. The returned exiles from Babylon have lived their lives and have passed away. A new generation lives. The captivity is a thing of the distant past. Seventy-five years have worn away since the city of Jerusalem began to rise from its ashes. Who are now the three heroes of the land? Nehemiah the governor reforms the political errors of the land. Ezra the scribe reforms the ceremonial errors of the land. Malachi the prophet reforms the religious errors of the land. Prince, priest and prophet join hands in the glorious work. Through their agency the people renew their covenant vows, and enter once more on a new career.

One thing was lacking. No sacred fire burned on Jehovah's Altar. The fire which came down from heaven on the old Altar had never gone out, till the fall of Jerusalem. On through the ages it had burned. But now it was gone. What shall they do? Use common fire? Shall we here be guided by tradition? Just before the city fell a priest, it is said, had concealed the sacred fire in a pit. The tradition was handed down among the priests. Now they begin the search. In the place where it was said the fire had been hid they find nothing but thick muddy water. They lift it from the pit, and sprinkle it on the Altar. As soon as the sun began

to shine the sacred fire blazed on the Altar. This tradition serves at least to show how great value Israel attached to the sacred fire. A library of sacred books is gathered in the Temple. The law is regularly read, and the truth is preached in public to the people. No reformation was ever more greatly needed; none was ever more energetically introduced; none was ever more effectively executed than that which was initiated and prosecuted by Malachi the Luther of his day.

IV.—MALACHI THE REVEALER

He is not a painter. He gives us no beautiful pictures to look upon. He has no rapt vision to tell us about. He records no converse with angels, to entertain the reader. He unfolds no panorama before us, in which we may see events merging into one another. He presents no vista of numerous and successive events, that constitute the roll of the future ages. As a revealer of the future, he comes before us rather as a witness plainly to tell us what he has seen without illustration or embellishment. Three facts of the future he states. He presents them as etchings, so to speak, barest outlines, sharp, short and plain.

1. Messiah's Herald.—When a person of note traveled in olden times, he generally sent before him a courier or herald to proclaim his approach, prepare the way, and make ready for his reception. The Jews were looking for their Messiah. Malachi announces that His herald shall go before Him. This was fulfiled in John. A voice of one crying

in the wilderness, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight."

2. Messiah's Sudden Appearance.—Though long looked for and prayed for, yet when the Hope of Israel should come, He would find the people unprepared. Instead of receiving glad welcome from them all, He would have to become a refiner's fire to separate the silver and the dross. To take the pure and cast the bad away. He came to his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God.

3. Conversion of the Gentiles.—His name shall be great among the Gentiles. The people to whom were committed the oracles of God were trifling with the precious gift. The heathen, in his darkness, was even then groaning beneath his burdens, and restlessly and unconsciously sighing for a better portion. In Persia, China, India, Greece, the philosophers were groping in the twilight, feeling after truth, unable completely to extricate themselves from the intense shadows of the world's great night. At last one of the greatest of them exclaims: "We must wait till a great Teacher comes from the skies to set us right." Malachi looks on the one picture, and then on the other. No wonder then he writes, "From the rising of the sun to the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles." Where to-day are found the custodians of the truth, and guardians of the Sacred Name? Truly, among the Gentile nations of the world. The name above all other names is nowhere greater

in this day than with the Occidental peoples of the world.

In the Public Library of Boston there is a mural painting representing these illustrious prophets whose lives we have been studying. It is a series of pictures of the men artistically portrayed. Each is presented by masterful conception and skillful execution in the order, costume, attitude, and expression best calculated to convey his individuality, his time, his mission. Each person is a study. Each is different from all the others. Each is a separate unit. Each makes his personal contribution to the prophetic message and the prophetic work.

The observer, however, cannot refrain from the reflection that One Spirit moves them all. There is to them all a common purpose and a common thought. The message is one. The presentation of it is varied. One song they sing, but ever to different music. Their voices, however different, constitute a grand harmony. Their tuneful parts beautifully blend, undisturbed by a discordant note.

In these studies we have found it so. We have walked through the gallery of distinguished worthies. We have traced their features and have tarried in their company. We have learned to know the men somewhat, to know them as our fellowmen and as our friends, to value their friendship, to appropriate their helpful words, and to feel their sympathetic touch.

They have thus become to us more than names. They are men whose distinctive features are scarcely obscured by the ages through which we gaze upon

them. Like those works of art whose features are so strongly drawn and so deeply carved and so roughly wrought that distance by its lift, loom, and light only serves to show what they really are and as the artist meant them to appear—these prophets, men of magnitude and might, too great, too mighty for near judgment of their worth, lose nothing as they are viewed through the interval of ages, but rather gain by the toning touch of time. Of heroic size, they are best seen afar. The statue made for the height is better seen after it is lifted to its abiding place. Each prophet occupies his appropriate niche in the sacred Hall of Fame.

In the study of these prophets we have marked their dissimilarities. We have felt refreshed by the grateful change afforded in passing from one to another. But in all we have found the same Divine Spirit by whom they have all been moved.

We have now reached the end. The light of prophecy, which with three brief intervals has continuously shone for four hundred years, now shines in the person of Malachi, the last of this remarkable series of divinely gifted men. In his prophetic gleam we look afar and see the herald of the gospel standing on the distant shore beyond the intervening sea of darkness. His light brightens, and again we look and see the long expected Messiah suddenly appear beyond the heavy shadows. Once more the light of the prophet glows. It is a far reach. It is a distant picture. Bright, beautiful, and full of hope the scene we gaze on: The Gentile world bows at Jehovah's presence and in Jehovah's name.

Then all is dark, intensely dark! The beautiful light has gone out in deep night. The last of these great prophets falls. Hear his final words. What does he say? What is the concluding note of all his music? As the light fades the great messenger in whispered tones concludes his message: Lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.

The prophet dies. But his lingering words of warning echo over four hundred years of oppressive shadows, the long and weary night wherein there was no heavenly vision seen, no heavenly voice heard. In the silence and the shadows we wait for the morning and the message of another brighter, better day. We wait till the dark shadows shall flee, and the Gospel day shall dawn, and the Sun of Righteousness shall rise. On the shadowed shore we stand, but

"We are watching, we are waiting,
For the bright prophetic day;
When the shadows, weary shadows,
From the world shall roll away.

We are waiting for the morning,
When the beauteous day is dawning;
We are waiting for the morning,
For the golden spires of day.

Lo! He comes! See the King draw near!
Zion, shout! The Lord is here!"